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~~Heath Ledger~~
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editorial

Star Whackers from Outer Space

TINSELTOWN MELTDOWN

In a couple of months' time, we'll see Earth facing an extraterrestrial threat once again. Twenty years on from the 1996 blockbuster *Independence Day*, the aliens are back, and presumably still bent on our destruction, in *Independence Day: Resurgence*, a long-delayed (if not necessarily long-awaited) sequel that probably hopes to do for enormous flying saucers what *Jurassic World* did for theme-park dinosaurs.

Director Roland Emmerich and numerous cast members from the original will be returning – but not, it seems, Oscar-nominated actor Randy Quaid (right), who provided comic relief the first time around. Some would say he's been providing comic relief of a different kind in recent years by taking on the persona of a particularly eccentric conspiracy theorist. Looking more like a better-fed John the Baptist or an extra from *Monty Python's Life of Brian* than a Hollywood star, he's been spinning a yarn about a shadowy, ever-growing plot to bump off Tinseltown's finest.

"They", of course, are onto him; which must explain the antics of Quaid and his wife Evi, arrested on a number of occasions and fleeing from the USA to Canada and back again to stay one step ahead of law enforcement and/or "them". It's been a very public meltdown, as the Quaids have been posting a series of increasingly weird videos on the Internet and telling anyone who'll listen about their plight. Perhaps hiding in plain sight is just the best policy when the 'Star Whackers' – as Randy calls them – have already taken out everyone from Heath Ledger to Michael Jackson. This isn't the first example of a dark Hollywood conspiracy we've come across – see **FT266:32-37** for the genuinely chilling story of Gary Devore's death – but it may well be the daftest.

A FEAST OF FOLKLORE

Formidable folklorist (and sometime *FT*-contributor) Jeremy Harte has announced an upcoming event that sounds unmissable if, like us, you harbour dual passions for folklore and food and would like to explore their rich relationship. "This two-day conference on 'Food and Drink in Legend and Tradition' will be held on Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th September 2016 as the eleventh Legendary Weekend of the Folklore Society, at St Nicks Environment Centre, Rawdon Avenue, York YO10 3ST. We'd like to hear from anyone who can contribute – folklorists, nutritionists, storytellers, cooks, social historians, brewers, butchers and bakers. Presentations, which should be 20 minutes long, can take the form of talks, performances, or DVD." If you would like to attend or to present a paper or performance, please contact Jeremy on 020 8394 1734 or by email at bhallmuseum@gmail.com.

ERRATA

FT336:72: Conor Dowd of Cobh, Co Cork, pointed out that in the letter "Festive fruit", Chair in Co Tipperary should be Cahir.

FT338:25: A number of readers, including Paul Appleby of Boston, Lincolnshire, spotted a typo in our obituary of Nancy Sandars. We referred to the 'sea peoples' as a confederacy of "navel raiders", prompting much comment on the threat they posed to the belly buttons of coastal Mediterranean dwellers toward the end of the second millennium BC.

FT339:10: Tom Ruffles of London writes: "I see in the latest issue that one of the Chris Masseys mentioned in the sidelines column is only 22 yet has worked for the Co-op in Manchester for 13 years. Should they be prosecuted for child labour? Or are the ages of the two Masseys the wrong way round?" Martin Stubbs of London, spotted this too, and noted that this would have meant that one of the Masseys "had started working there at the age of nine". Referring back to the *Sun* clipping, we find that the first Chris Massey was 32, not 22.

FT339:18: Alan Murdie reports an error in his Ghostwatch column, in which he stated that the Fraudulent Mediums Act dated from 1954. In fact it was passed in 1951 and then repealed and replaced by Consumer Protection From Unfair Trading Regulations in 2008.

FT339:25: In our obituary of Robert Spitzer there was a reference to "pot-traumatic stress disorder". Yes, we meant "post-traumatic stress disorder"; and, yes, this sounds like an entirely different if equally plausible condition.

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

The Bard's missing head

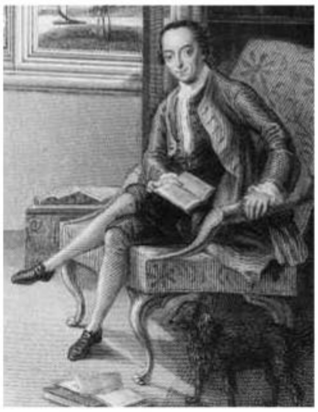
Was Shakespeare's skull stolen at the request of early Gothic novelist?

On the quatercentenary of William Shakespeare's death this year, a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) scan of his tomb in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford upon Avon, appeared to show that his skull is missing. Evidence of a significant repair to the head end of the grave led to the theory that it was needed to correct a sinking of the floor, possibly caused by a previous disturbance. The repair gives new credence to a story by "a Warwickshire Man" published in *Argosy* magazine in 1879, claiming that Horace Walpole, son of Prime Minister Robert Walpole and hero of the Gothic Revival, had in 1769 offered £300 to anyone who could obtain the skull. The story told how a Dr Frank Chambers heard of the offer at a dinner party in Ragley Hall in 1794 and that he and three local men broke into the tomb and stole the skull; but he failed to persuade the 77-year-old Walpole or anyone else to buy it, so arranged for Dyer, one of the grave robbers, to return it. A second version of the tale, published *Argosy* in 1884, said Dyer had not returned the skull, but had hidden it in a vault beneath the Sheldon Chapel in St Leonard's Church, Beoley, some 15 miles (24km) outside Stratford. That skull is still in situ, but a recent laser scan and forensic analysis revealed it belonged to an unknown woman in her seventies. "A Warwickshire Man" is thought to be Rev CJ Langston, vicar of Beoley from 1881 to 1889.

Good friend for Jesus' sake forbear,
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blessed be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones.

BEN PRUCHNIE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Shakespeare's grave on Holy Trinity Church. **BELOW:** Horace Walpole.



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

> "It's convincing that his skull isn't at Holy Trinity at all"

Archæologist Kevin Colls of Staffordshire University, who carried out the Stratford investigation with geophysicist Erica Utsi, concluded: "We have Shakespeare's burial with an odd disturbance at the head end and we have a story that suggests that at some point in history someone's come in and taken his skull. It's very, very convincing to me that his skull isn't at Holy Trinity at all." However, the vicar of Holy Trinity, Rev Patrick Taylor, said he was "not convinced that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that his skull has been taken. We intend to continue to respect the sanctity of his grave, in accordance with Shakespeare's wishes, and not allow it to be disturbed. We shall have to live with the mystery of not knowing fully what lies beneath the stone."

The Bard's final resting place has long been the subject of argument among historians and archæologists, because it is too short for an adult burial. It also carries no name, only this warning:

GOOD FREND FOR IESVS SAKE FORBEARE,
TO DIGG THE DVST ENCLOSED HEARE:
BLESE BE YE MAN YT SPARES THES STONES,
AND CVRST BE HE YT MOVES MY BONES.

The survey found the playwright, his wife Anne Hathaway and other relatives were not buried in a large family vault deep underground, as had long been thought, but in shallow graves beneath the church floor. William and Anne's graves are less than a metre deep. His grave was found to be significantly longer than his short stone – extending west towards the head end, making it the same size as the other family graves. The GPR also found no evidence of metal in the area of the grave, such as coffin nails, suggesting they were not buried in coffins but simply wrapped in winding sheets or shrouds and buried in soil.

A Channel 4 documentary on the discovery was broadcast on 26 March. *D.Telegraph, 2 Nov 2015 + 24 Mar 2016; Leamington Spa Observer, 5 Nov; Church Times, 6 Nov 2015; BBC News, 23 Mar 2016.*

- A copy of Shakespeare's First Folio has been discovered in the library of Mount Stuart House on the Isle of Bute, and confirmed as genuine by Emma Smith, professor of Shakespeare studies at Oxford. Published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, the First Folio brought together the majority of his plays. The discovery brings the total known number of copies to 234, out of a print run of 750. Documentation shows that the Bute copy belonged to an actor called John Henderson, who in 1786 gave it to Isaac Reed, a literary editor working in London. It was sold in 1807, after Reed's death, to a "JW", and reappeared in a catalogue of the Bute library in 1896. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 8 April 2016.*

ODD BOOK TITLES

From Wilson, Keppel & Betty to a cultural history of the anus

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EXCREMENT & ESPIONAGE

Chairman Mao versus Stalin and the communist turd burglars

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FUNERAL SURPRISES

Reports of their deaths were greatly exaggerated

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The Conspirasphere

NOEL ROONEY argues that recent news stories about the Zika virus and global warming demonstrate the mainstreaming of conspiracy memes – helped by the Internet, of course...

Two recent online furores have added to the already strong impression that conspiracy theory is fast becoming mainstream. This, presumably, only goes to prove (to its more rabid opponents at least) that conspiracy theory presages the end of civilisation as we know it. Or perhaps it suggests that the democratisation of knowledge (used in its broadest sense) facilitated by the Internet inevitably drags marginal knowledge into the public domain. In either case, it does seem to this writer that almost everyone subscribes to one conspiracy theory or another now; it's just a case of which department in the great supermarket of ideas one chooses to shop in.

The outbreak of Zika virus, first in South America and later in many other parts of the world, is a good example of conspiracy creep in the media. While few media outlets are supporting the idea that the virus is carried exclusively by genetically modified mosquitoes originally designed and released into the wild to combat malaria (pictured above), quite a few of them are reporting on it. In the UK, both the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* (among others) have covered the story, with a fair degree of credulity, and it has appeared in respectable organs of the press across the world.

This has inevitably led to the spectacle of scientists who probably ought to be getting on with something else spending time refuting the story to anyone (less 'credulous' media outlets?) who will listen to – and print – their views. There is nothing inherently ridiculous in the idea that a crude piece of bio-invasive experimentation should backfire, of course (think cane toad) and that has probably aided dissemination; but the speed of the meme's spread, and the reaction it has caused, are quite impressive.

GETTY IMAGES

Then there's Edward Snowden and the Great Global Warming Hoax. Snowden is everyone's favourite conspiracy whistleblower, not least because the vast reams of deliciously sinister stuff he has leaked are clearly genuine. So when the Internet began to buzz with a story that he had seen documents proving that global warming was an artificial panic created by the CIA as far back as the 1950s, it quickly garnered attention, even on some of the more respectable conspiracy sites.

Global warming is a deeply and passionately contested arena of conflicting ideas. People tend to believe wholeheartedly in it, and accept the (equally contested) scientific consensus, or reject it as a plot by the meteorological arm of THEM to force us all into serfdom on deviously eugenic wind farms. There is a clear political divide among most adherents and opponents too; so this story appeared to be proof that either Snowden had crossed the political divide (no more liberal leaks then), or that the 'deniers' had been right all along.

Well, the debate will have to rage on a little longer; Snowden has not spilled the climate hoax beans after all. The story can be traced back to the *World Daily News Report*, an exponent of a type of spoof reporting that has come to be known as 'fauxtire': seeding false stories onto the web for fun, profit and maybe just to teach us all a lesson about gullibility in the age of information.

www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/zika-outbreak-caused-release-genetically-7281671; www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3425381/Are-scientists-blame-Zika-virus-Researchers-released-genetically-modified-mosquitos-Brazil-three-years-ago.html; http://worldnewsdailyreport.com/edward-snowden-global-warming-is-an-invention-of-the-cia/

EXTRA! EXTRA!

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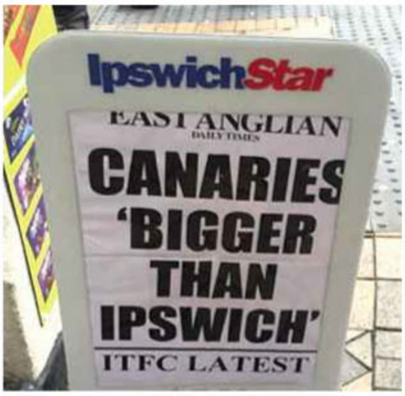

IpswichStar

EAST ANGLIAN DAILY TIMES

CANARIES 'BIGGER THAN IPSWICH'

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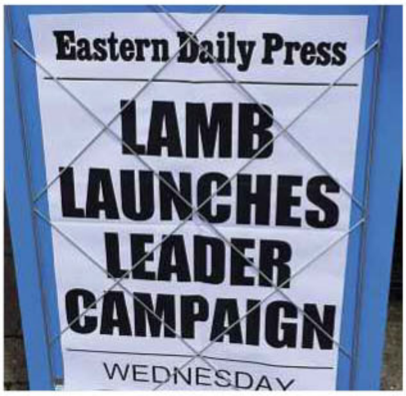
Ipswich (Suffolk) Star, 28 Mar 2015.



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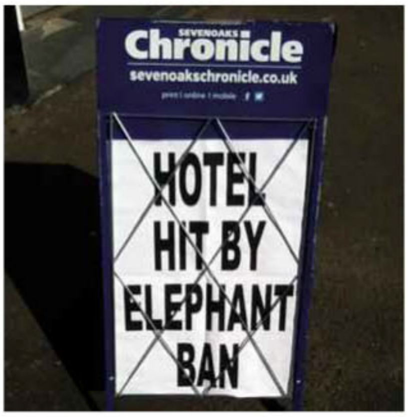
WEDNESDAY

Eastern Daily Press, 10 June 2015.



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HOTEL HIT BY ELEPHANT BAN

Sevenoaks Chronicle, 18 April 2015.

SOVIET BUS STOPS

For the past 12 years, Canadian photographer Christopher Herwig has travelled throughout the former Soviet Union snapping more than 9,000 photographs of the region's unexpectedly whimsical architecture for his book *Soviet Bus Stops* – which presents more than 150 bus stops in 13 different countries. "I rarely found anything cool within a city," he said. The most elaborate structures were located in the countryside. Many fell under the purview of the government's roads department and were largely built in the 1970s, during a time when Soviet architecture was dominated by a mass-produced brutalist æsthetic. However, transportation was a point of pride for the Soviet Union, which is one reason architects could take so many liberties.

The bus stops were almost like mascots for villages. In Belarus, many incorporated rubble stones, while in Estonia, most were made from wood. Others – like Zurab Tsereteli's designs along the Soviet Riviera – were far more ornate. One in Taraz, Khazakstan, is a sheet of folded steel propped up by two legs and contorted into the shape of a spaceship. Another, in Rokiskis, Lithuania, is a simple concrete rectangle painted neon yellow and green. The least practical of them all is a Tsereteli masterpiece in Abkhazia featuring a bench with an open, crown-like structure overhead. You wouldn't want to rely on many of these bus stops during the region's cold, harsh winters, but as Tsereteli explained, functionality was never really the point. "I cannot speak to why there is no roof," he said. "Why this, why that – that's their problem. As an artist, I must do everything artistically." *wired.com, 30 Sept 2015*.

PHOTOS: CHRISTOPHER HERWIG / FUEL PUBLISHING

***Soviet Bus Stops* is available online from fuel-design.com**

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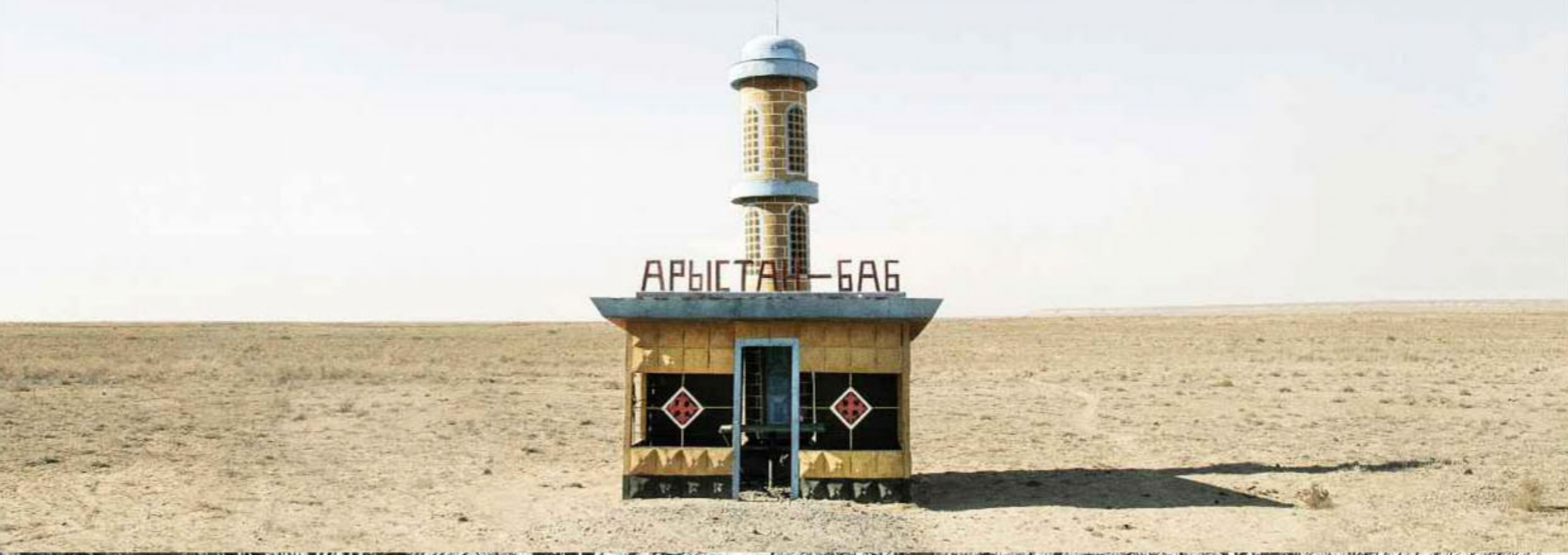
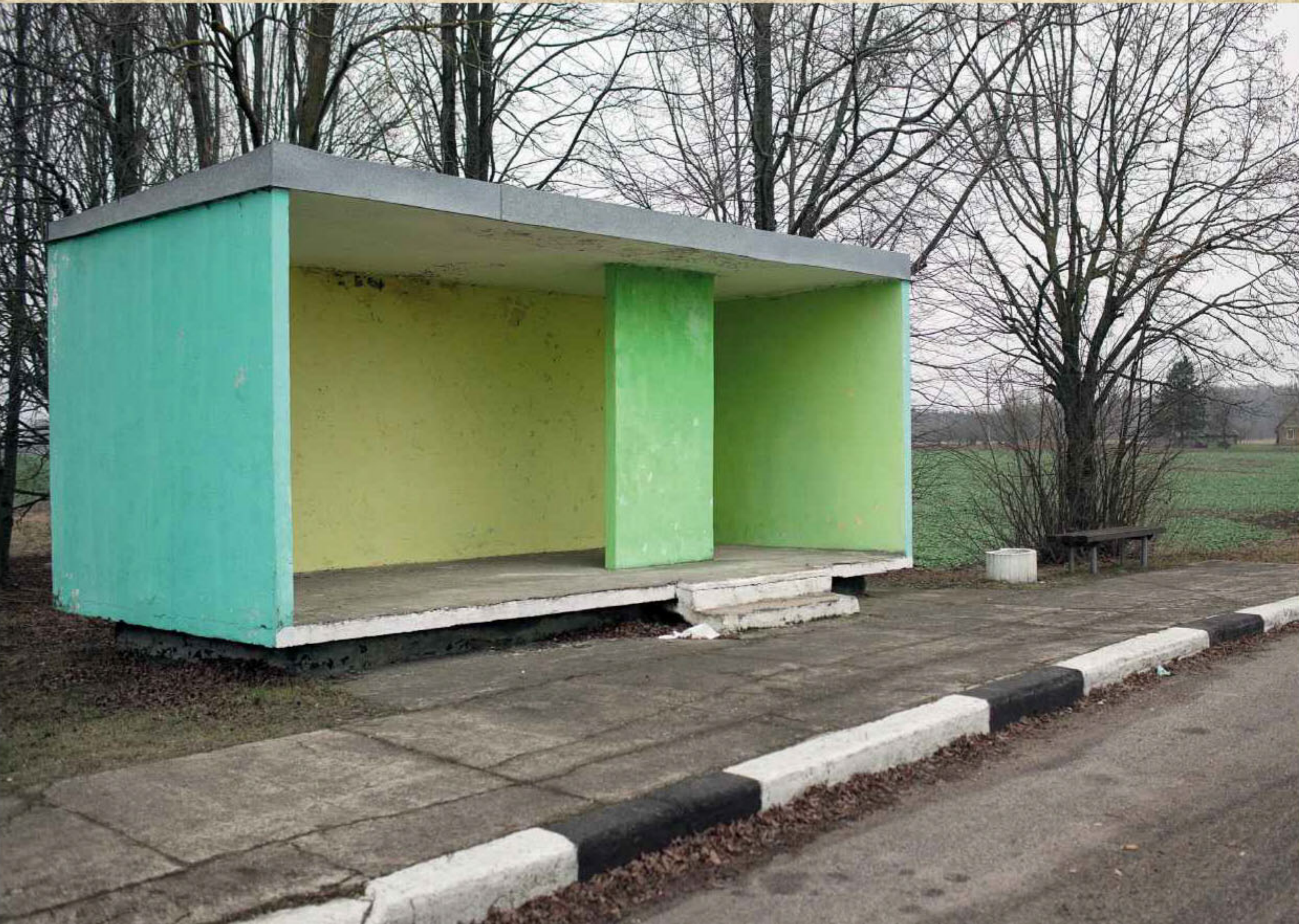
SOVIET BUS STOPS





What's that sound?

Mysterious clangs, whines and wails disturb the peace

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Since last September, residents of an apartment block in Regents Park, London – Grasmere House in Osnaburgh Street (pictured above) – have been plagued by a mysterious metallic clanging, starting around 4am and going on for hours every night. Daniel Bouve said he had been left feeling like a walking zombie. "It's gotten so bad that I've just been like, 'My God, is our building going to collapse?' We've started calling it 'the Ghost of Grasmere' because it's so weird." The communal heating system initially took the blame; but when the noise continued after plumbers replaced worn parts – and lift engineers also failed to find a cause – residents' suspicions began to turn on each other. A late night weightlifter and a prankster with a sledgehammer were among the explanations circulating in the 40-home, 10-storey block.

The noise began to take its toll, with people taking time off work due to lack of sleep and some running up hotel bills in search of a peaceful night. A group called Spectrum Paranormal Investigations (SPI) planned to investigate with equipment including an "electric magnetic field detector" and a "ghost ark" – described by SPI member Dean Williams as "an all-in-one paranormal research tool". Hazel Williams, 50, who founded the group in 1996, said: "We'd have to review some of the old maps of the area and see if it was a religious site and have graveyards underneath, or perhaps there's a subway or tunnels." No further news has reached Fortean Towers. *Camden New Journal, 21+28 Jan; Sun, 29 Jan 2016.*

- Last February, an unexplained high-pitched tone disturbed residents of Forest Grove, a rustic community of 22,500 located about 25 miles (40 km) west of Portland, Oregon. It kept them awake at night for over a week, confounding the best efforts of police and firefighters to pinpoint its source. It was also driving pets crazy. Local fire marshal Dave Nemeyer first learned of the strange noise after a local resident recorded and shared a video of it on the city's Facebook page. "It's definitely a horrendous noise," he said. "[The resident] said that it was coming from the middle of the street. To me, it sounds like the sound of train tracks, that metal screeching sound, but there are no train tracks near her home…"

The noise – also described as a steady, whistle-like note resembling a flute – was only heard after dark, lasting from 10 seconds to several minutes. Former residents said they remembered a similar sound several decades ago. The tone is unusual for its combination of high pitch and ambiguous point of origin, said audio engineer Tobin Cooley, president of the company Listen Acoustics. "Higher frequencies like this tone are very directional sounds, versus low-frequency sounds which can seem to come from anywhere or everywhere at once," he said. "What surprises me is that neighbours have not been able to locate where this is coming from. It sounds like some sort of pressurised gas or air through a fitting or valve or something. It's not steady state, and you can't predict when it's going to happen. Those are all interesting sound features." Officials with the local gas company said they had ruled out any of the utility's equipment or pipelines as a source. "We sent a tech out, and he spent the whole day investigating," said Melissa Moore, spokeswoman for Northwest Natural Gas. She added that a gas leak would also produce an odour, which had not been reported. Could it be a ghost train… or the call of Cthulhu? *ABC News, 17 Feb; oregonlive.com, 22 Feb; [R] 23 Feb 2016.*

- A ghostly wail like a WWII siren that kept Swansea residents awake in the small hours [**FT334:4**], 75 years after the Luftwaffe blitz destroyed much of the city centre, ceased without being identified. It had been heard regularly for more than a year. *Western Mail, 3 Nov 2015.*

SIDELINES…

FISH RAIN

At 11.30pm on 31 January, a rain of fish fell at several locations in the town of Dire Dawa, eastern Ethiopia. Residents regarded the event as a blessing from God and quickly gathered up the fish. Meteorologist Efrem Mamo blamed a cyclone and said a similar incident occurred in Hawasa, Ethiopia, 10 years ago. *Ethiopian Herald, 2 Feb 2016*.

GNOME ALERT

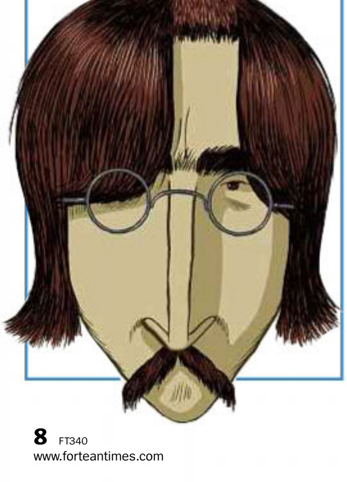
Concerned drivers contacted police on 23 February to report a man carrying a "small child" near junction two on the M60 in Greater Manchester. On investigation, he was found to be holding a garden gnome. *BBC News, 24 Feb 2016.*

SUMERIAN LOOPHOLE

Over two weeks last November and December, more than 3,100 people, almost one per cent of Iceland's population, registered as Zuists, a movement that worships ancient Sumerian gods. They object to paying part of their taxes to the state church and other religious bodies; followers of Zuism will be refunded the tax element earmarked for religion – currently about £53 per annum. Zuism was registered as a religion in Iceland in 2013. *Guardian, 9 Dec 2015.*

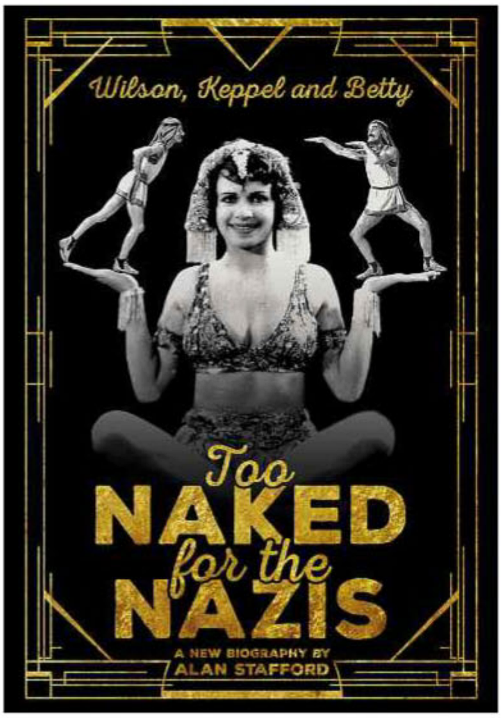
SIXTIES RELIC

A 4in (10cm) lock of John Lennon's hair fetched £24,000 at auction in Dallas. A Hamburg barber cut the lock in 1967, shortly before the Beatle was filmed in *How I Won the War*. *D.Telegraph, 22 Feb 2016.*


MARTIN ROSS

The appeal of the odd

These days, authors actively try to win the Diagram Prize

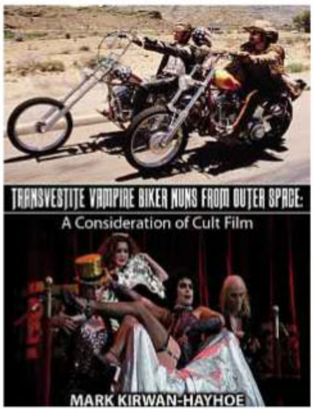


The winner of the 38th Diagram Prize for the oddest book title of the past year, announced by *The Bookseller*, is Alan Stafford's *Too Naked For The Nazis*, about the career of vaudeville trio Wilson, Keppel and Betty – said to be "the inspiration for the Chuckle Brothers". The author commented: "I'm hugely grateful to everyone who took the trouble to vote for me. A good title not only tells the public what the book's about, sometimes it tells the author too. *Too Naked For The Nazis* pinpoints the central event of my book – when a trio of comedy Egyptian sand dancers incurred the wrath of the Nazi high command by a blatant exposure of hairy legs. It was when the title started provoking more comment than the book that I began to appreciate its worth."

There's no cash prize, but Stafford takes home "a passable bottle of claret". His book beat *Reading from Behind: A Cultural History of the Anus*, by Jonathan Allan, with 24.8 per cent of the public vote compared to 24.3 per cent. Other contenders included: *Soviet Bus Stops*, by Christopher Herwig (see pp6-7); *Reading the Liver: Papyrological Texts on Ancient Greek Extispicy*, by William Furley and Victor Gysembergh (an academic study on sacrificial sheep); and *Transvestite Vampire Biker Nuns from Outer Space: A Consideration of Cult Film*, by Mark Kirwan-Hayhoe. Then there was the somewhat less exciting *Paper Folding with Children* by Alice Hornecke and *Behind the Binoculars: Interviews with Acclaimed Birdwatchers* by Mark Avery and Keith Betton. "*Reading the Liver* has become my go-to book on divining the will of the gods from the entrails of animals," said Diagram Prize administrator Horace Bent. "I can also imagine it becoming the core text at a pop-up street food vendor in Shoreditch. And *Transvestite Vampire Biker Nuns from Outer Space* is not only a trenchant examination of cult film, but would be an excellent theme for your next fancy dress party."

> **"An excellent theme for your next fancy dress party"**

"What is interesting is the trend for authors in the last couple of years to nominate their own books and then go out and actively campaign for the prize," said the *Bookseller's* Tom Tivnan. "Mr Stafford's Twitter electioneering for his book bordered on an Ahabian monomania. And why not? I think writers have recognised that winning the Diagram could mean a boost in sales of tens, maybe even as much as a hundred copies. High stakes indeed." Tivnan explained that the prize was not awarded in "two very dark years – 1987 and 1991", due to a lack of odd titles. The Gang of Fort's all-time favourite remains the 1996 winner, *Greek Rural Postmen and Their Cancellation Numbers*. It has a certain epic quality… *theguardian.com, 25 Feb; BBC News, 18 Mar 2016.*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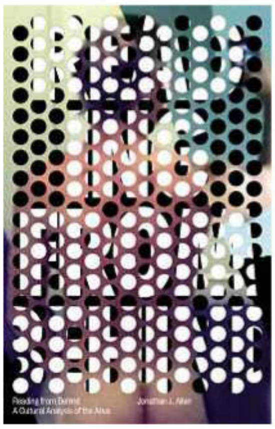
A Consideration of Cult Film
MARK KIRWAN-HAYHOE



SIDELINES...

SOLAR STUPIDITY

The town of Woodland, California, has voted three to one against re-zoning a section of land so that it could be used to build a new solar farm. Citizens feared the latter would soak up the sun, making photosynthesis impossible – a belief held by retired science teacher (!) Jane Mann. Others feared an increase in cancer and the abandonment of the town by its young. *bgr.com (technology news), 14 Dec 2015.*

LONG TIME NO SEE

A woman of 82 met her birth mother following a 50-year hunt, following the death of her adoptive parents. Betty Morrell, of Florida, was taken from her 14-year-old mother by the state of New York in 1933. Lena Pierce, now 96, was re-united with her daughter on 15 January. *Sun, 8 Feb 2016.*

BEDROOM TERROR

An 82-year-old woman in Wisconsin contacted police to report her neighbours as Daesh sympathizers. She had heard them chanting "ISIS is good, ISIS is great" while having sex. "Maybe she was taking 'See something, say something' a little too far," said a police spokesman. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 24 Dec 2015.*

TWIN CLUSTERS

The village of Valikaya in Ukraine has been dubbed 'Land of the Twins' after it emerged that 122 of its 4,000 residents were part of sets. And between 11 February and 15 October 2015, six sets of twins were born to staff all working at Highfields fire station in Beeston, Nottinghamshire. *Sun, 28 Jan; Sunday Express, 3 Jan 2016.*

BOWLER'S BELIEF

Speaking on the Australian *I'm A Celebrity* TV programme, cricket legend Shane Warne, 46, said that extraterrestrials experimented on monkeys to make mankind. "If we've evolved from monkeys," he asked, "why haven't those evolved? Maybe [the aliens] turned a few monkeys into humans and said, 'Yeah, it works'." Warne also insisted aliens built the pyramids. *Metro, 16 Feb 2016.*

SIDELINES...

BUDGIE YAWNS

Bio-psychologists in New York have discovered that budgerigars yawn; and when one yawns, others follow, even if they only see the yawn in a video clip. It is the first time contagious yawning – common among humans, dogs, monkeys and rats – has been discovered in a non-mammal species. The scientists believe the budgies' behaviour is not involuntary but "a primitive form of showing empathy". *D.Mail, 30 May 2015.*

COP FLOP

Police in Palm Springs, California, responded to a tip-off that there were armed men in a house, so they laid siege to the joint at 11am. A SWAT team was also called in, bringing extra donuts. They were still there 15 hours later when someone thought of knocking on the door. There was no one home. *The Picture (Australian magazine), 14 Dec 2015.*

PAYING IN BLOOD

Last July, a Transylvanian music festival offered a 30 per cent discount to anyone donating blood at one of Romania's 42 blood centres. Organisers of the Untold Festival in Cluj-Napoca also offered free one-day tickets to anyone giving blood at a mobile unit in Bucharest or at a blood transfusion centre in Cluj-Napoca. (Romania ranks second to last in Europe for the number of active blood donors.) *Guardian, 18 July 2015.*

IDAHO POLICE

MEDICAL BAG

MORE MEDICAL MARVELS, INCLUDING A BIONIC GIRL, TEARS OF BLOOD AND STONES FROM THE EYES

ROSS PARRY / SWNS GROUP

ABOVE: The unbreakable Olivia Farnsworth: "It's like she's made of steel".

BIONIC GIRL

Olivia Farnsworth is never hungry, never tired and never feels pain. The seven-year-old from Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, is believed to be the only person in the world to exhibit all three symptoms of her rare genetic disorder. She takes medication to send her to sleep and is trained to eat regularly, as she can go without food for three days. "It's like she's made of steel," said her mother, Niki Trepak, 32. "She got run over and was dragged about 10 car lengths down the road. It was horrendous, but she didn't even cry. She just got up and started walking back. She had a tyre mark on her chest. Doctors think what saved her was she didn't tense up. She had scans and X-rays, but there was nothing. Her only injuries were she had no skin on her toe or her hip. The hospital says she's bionic."

Niki – who has four other children, aged 12, 10, six and four – realised baby Olivia was unusual as she never cried. She stopped sleeping in the day at the age of nine months, and her hair didn't grow properly until she was four years old. However, it wasn't until a fall at nursery, when she bit through her lip but felt nothing, that it was found she had chromosome 6 deletion, where some of her DNA is missing – a condition so rare it has no medical name. This can lead to birth defects and learning difficulties, but the effects have never been so dramatic as they are in Olivia. Dr Beverly Searle, chief executive of chromosome disorder support group Unique, said Olivia was the only case they had heard of in the world. Of 15,000 chromosome disorder cases on their worldwide database, only 100 are the '6p' deletion that Olivia has. Her mother said: "Olivia's beaming all the time. If I could bottle and sell her personality, I'd be rich. She's amazing."

Nine-year-old Alice Rambridge is also immune to pain [**FT319:10**], but in her case this is a symptom of ACC (agenesis of the corpus callosum): the bridge connecting her cranial hemispheres is missing. In 2011, we reported on Josh Hodgkiss, a three-year-old boy who could feel no pain, because he was born with Smith-Magenis syndrome, a genetic disorder affecting one in 25,000 children [**FT280:16**]. Another pain-immune child was two-year-old Hannah Thompson in 1996. She suffered from sensory neuropathy type four, a hereditary genetic disorder affecting only 30 people worldwide [**FT97:19**]. *Sun, D.Mail, D.Mirror, D.Express, 16 Jan 2016.*

BLEEDING NIGHTMARE

Marnie-Rae Harvey, 17, from Stoke-on-Trent, bleeds from her eyes. "It burns and then if it covers the pupils of my eye I can't see," she said. The mystery condition also affects her ears, nose, gums, scalp, fingernails and tongue. Following a chesty cough in February 2013, she started coughing up blood; that continued for a couple of years until she woke one night in July 2015 with her face covered in blood. She was bleeding from her eye, but when she got to Staffordshire hospital everything was clear. "[My eyes] can bleed and it can cover my face with blood and in seconds it's just gone completely white back to normal," she said. "I had blood tests and they came back fine." For the next

FACEBOOK

ABOVE: Bloody pictures from Melanie-Rae Harvey’s Facebook page.

two weeks her eyes continued to bleed every day; then both her eyes and ears started bleeding and she hospitalised again. She had multiple tests that showed she had a weakened immune system, but nothing more. One medical student who examined her even suggested stigmata. Hæmolacria is the medical term for tears of blood, but the condition is very rare. (For other examples, see **FT243:11, 255:5, 311:8-9.**) Causes can include injuries, clotting problems and tear gland disorders – but Marnie-Rae has none of these.

Her life is on hold; she has been unable to sit her GCSEs or attend college. She lacks energy and constantly feels light-headed. Her limbs and bones often ache. “The last 12 days it’s been bleeding non-stop and everything’s been bleeding at once,” she said. “Normally it’ll bleed for about five minutes then stop for an hour but it’s been happening for half and hour and stopping for five minutes. I have to keep getting up in the night but I’m sick every day about five times. They thought it was going to be a blood disorder but now I’ve had an injection called Prostap 3 to ‘stop my womb from working’ and if it’s that I’ll have an operation because they’ll look into endometriosis.”

She was told there’s a 60-70 per cent chance the injection might stop her from being fertile in the future, but in any case she doesn’t think it has worked. “The injection makes you go through menopause symptoms,” she said. “I’m going through the symptoms like sweating and mood swings but I’m still bleeding.” Next she’ll be referred to a skin specialist, but she doesn’t think it’s anything to do with her skin. “When I’m due on [my period] that’s when the bleeding gets worse. The gynæcologists say they’ll carry on [testing].” *Sun, 29 Dec 2015; BBC News, 11 Mar 2016.*

CRYING STONES

Ding Aihua from Lufang village in China’s Shandong province claims that stones the size of soybeans keep coming out of her eyes. According to her husband, Liang Xinchun, stones can be discovered under her eyelids whenever she suffered from a headache. Local doctors are baffled. The stones started to appear seven years ago when she felt a pain in her eyes. Liang removed one silvery-white stone from under her eyelid, but after a while another appeared. Liang said he has to use a small piece of iron wire to ease them out. He has removed more than a dozen and keeps them in a small bottle. “It really hurts her,” he said. “Sometimes it comes from the upper eyelid and sometimes from the lower.”

The couple have travelled across the country seeking treatment, but doctors refuse to believe them, so they have turned to the media for help. Ding is currently being treated at the Aier Eye Hospital in Heze city. Dr Cui Yinchun said no foreign substances have been found in Ding’s eyes, but she suffers from serious eye diseases, including conjunctivitis and trachoma. The stones have been sent to the regional mineral inspection authorities for further investigation. In 2014 it was reported that a 12-year-old from Yemen produced small, hard stones under her eyelids. For other examples of stone-weeping, see **FT185:9, 192:22, 284:12**. For the case of a Lebanese girl apparently weeping shards of glass, see **FT94:20**. *People’s Daily, via D.Mail online, 22 Feb 2016.*

EARRING ENDS MIGRAINE

Samantha Fisher, 25, of Tiverton, Devon, started suffering headaches when she was four, but they became intolerable five years ago. She was crippled with daily migraines, forcing her to stay in a dark room for days on end. She took up to 11 medications a day as well as trying many alternative therapies, but nothing worked. Then her mother read about a young woman who cured her migraines with an ear piercing. Ms Fisher got the same piercing through her ear’s innermost cartilage fold at the end of October, and five weeks later had been headache-free. “It bled quite a lot,” she said, “but as soon as I had it done I felt a relief.” It is thought the procedure – known as a daith piercing – helps ease migraines because it is the same pressure point targeted by acupuncturists to relieve chronic headaches. *Western Daily Press, 5 Dec 2015.*

ONE FROM THE ARCHIVE

When Betty Ward, a resident of Sunnyside, Washington State, woke up on 8 February 1926, she was blind. Alarmed, she put on her spectacles and was able to see a faint glimmer, although she could not distinguish objects round the room. Her parents took her immediately to a specialist in Yakima, who said that the girl’s defective tonsils had temporarily destroyed her vision, and that if they were removed, her sight might be restored. The operation was performed the following day and at the time of the report her sight was returning. She was apparently in good health, the condition coming upon her completely unawares. *Sunnyside Sun (Yakima County, Washington), 11 Feb 1926.*

SIDELINES...

ALBINO DOLPHIN

A rare albino Risso’s dolphin calf was spotted swimming with its mother in Monterey Bay, California, last October. Risso’s dolphins (aka Grampus), typically travel side by side, and are fairly active. They live an estimated 20 years minimum and possibly up to twice that long. *[AP] 6 Oct 2015.*

SELLING FRESH AIR

Vitality Air from Edmonton in Canada is bottling fresh air from the Rockies and selling it to the citizens of polluted Chinese cities. The trade began last October. A 7.7-litre can sells for about 100 yuan (£10), 50 times the price of a bottle of mineral water. “Our first shipment of 500 bottles were sold in four days,” said company co-founder Moses Lam. Vitality Air began as a joke. Then Leo De Watts, 27, from Gillingham in Dorset but resident in Hong Kong, began selling air from the Westcountry and Yorkshire, to Chinese urbanites at £80 per pot. *D.Telegraph, 16 Dec 2015 + 6 Feb 2006; D.Mail, 6 Feb 2016.*

GOD’S DEATH EXAGGERATED

Victor Krasnov, 38, could face jail after being charged with insulting the feelings of religious believers over an Internet exchange in which he wrote that “There is no God”. He made the comment in 2014 on a local website in his hometown of Stavropol in Russia, and a participant in the discussion lodged a complaint. Krasnov spent a month in a psychiatric ward before being deemed sane to stand trial. Of course, a mere 26 years ago, “There is no God” was state orthodoxy. *D.Telegraph, 4 Mar 2016.*

SPOOKED IN WALES

Between 2010 and 2015, North Wales Police were called 57 times about paranormal fears: twice about extraterrestrials, 21 times about ghosts, 10 times about witches, twice for zombies and twice about vampires. Hotspots included Wrexham, Bangor, Rhyl and Dolgellau. No arrests were made. *BBC News, 7 Jan 2015.*

MARTIN ROSS

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

David Hampson, 45, of Swansea, has been convicted for the seventh time of causing traffic jams by standing in front of vehicles, but he refuses to explain why he does it. After his second offence, he was convicted of being a public nuisance, then had convictions for breaching criminal behaviour orders. A prison term failed to deter him. One jury convicted him of "mute of malice" – refusing to speak. *Sun, 10 Dec 2015*.

RECORD RETURNS

Music writer John Flanagan found a record signed for him by Mick Jagger, which he had last seen 23 years earlier. It turned up in mid-December at a charity shop where he volunteers. The Rolling Stones' album *Emotional Rescue* was among donations to the Rock 'N' Roll Rescue Shop in Parkway, Camden Town, north London. It was part of Mr Flanagan's collection of vintage records stolen from a lock-up in Cross Street, Islington, in 1992. *Camden New Journal, 17 Dec 2015*.

SPECIAL BREW

To celebrate the pagan festival of Thorrablot, the Icelandic brewer Stedji prepared a special beer made of minced whale testicles smoked in sheep dung and mixed with hops. *Metro, 1 Feb 2016*.

DOLPHIN ESCORT

Adam Walker, 37, from Newark, Nottinghamshire, encountered a great white shark while swimming in Cook Strait in New Zealand. A pod of 12 dolphins immediately closed tight around him and escorted him for 90 minutes, only leaving when he was out of harm's way. *D.Star, 8 Jan 2016*.

MARTIN ROSS

Stalinist turdomancy

Was Chairman Mao subjected to excremental espionage?

ABOVE: Mao on the throne? A huge 120ft (36.6m) statue of Chairman Mao Zedong erected last January in Tongxu county in central China's Henan province. It was reportedly torn down a few days later because state approval had not been given.

While doing research in the archives of the Russian secret services, former Soviet agent Igor Atamanenko claims to have found evidence that Stalin spied on Mao Zedong, among others, by analysing excrement to construct psychological portraits.

According to Russian newspaper reports, in the 1940s the NKVD (Soviet secret police) set up a special department under Lavrenti Beria to collect foreign leaders' crap for analysis. "In those days," said Atamanenko, "the Soviets didn't have the kind of listening devices which secret services do today." He explained what these communist forensic turdomancers were looking for. "For example, if they detected high levels of amino acid Tryptophan, they concluded that person was calm and approachable. But a lack of potassium in poo was seen as a sign of a nervous disposition and someone with insomnia."

Atamanenko claims that in December 1949, Soviet spies used this system to evaluate Mao Zedong who was on a visit to Moscow. They allegedly installed special toilets for the great Pork Swordsman, which were connected not to sewers, but to secret boxes. For 10 days Mao was plied with food and drink and his waste products whisked off for analysis. Once Mao's stools had been scrutinised and studied, Stalin reportedly poo-pooed the idea of signing an agreement with him.

When Mao first arrived in Moscow, he announced that China looked forward to a partnership with Russia, but emphasised that he wanted to be treated as an equal. Instead, he was being taught a lesson each day and was as much captive as guest. He shouted at the walls, convinced that Stalin had bugged the house: "I am here to do more than eat and shit!" Russia's popular daily newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reported that Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, scrapped the crappy project and closed the laboratory. "We cannot comment on this story," announced Russia's Federal Security Service, the FSB. *BBC News, 28 Jan 2016*.

CHINESE WHISPERS

DOGS DISPEL GHOSTS

The Yulin Summer Solstice Lychee and Dog Meat Festival has been held annually in China's Guangxi province since 2009; some 10,000 dogs are killed and cooked for human consumption. In traditional Chinese medicine, dog meat is seen as a treatment for disease and impotence in men, and some believe eating it dispels ghosts. Cats are also consumed, though we are not told what cat meat is good for. *D.Telegraph, 3 June; Toronto Star, 20 June 2015*.

PET FOOD

Three Chinese workers mistook their boss's rare pet dog for a stray – and ate it. They cooked the Cardigan Welsh corgi after it was found roaming a steel plant in Xuzhou city in Jiangsu province. One was arrested and the other two were fired. *Metro, 23 Feb 2016*.

FELINE FLUSH

A 53-year-old Chinese man stands accused of stealth burglaries from rich foreigners in Melbourne spanning a decade. He spent millions of dollars at the city's Crown Casino despite being unemployed and thousands of luxury items were found beneath his house. The name of this cat burglar? Di Miao. *Canberra Times, 9 Jan 2016*.

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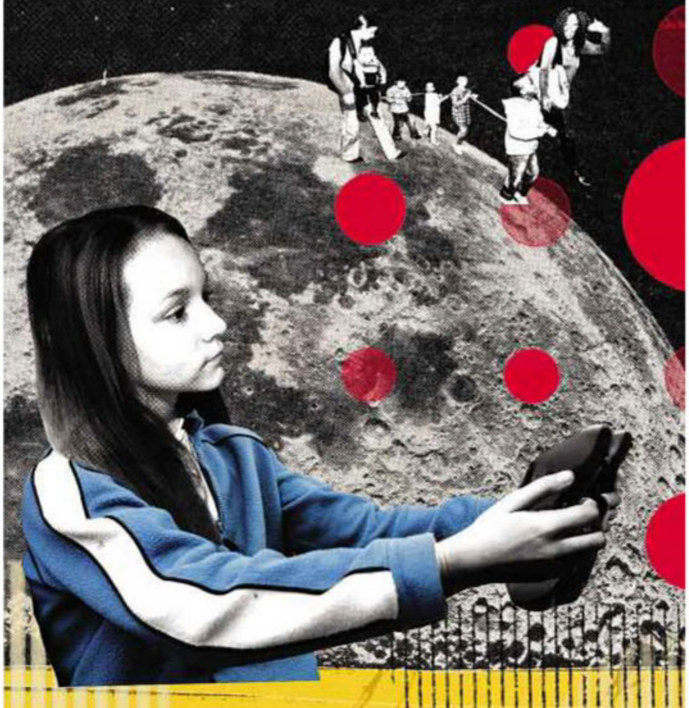

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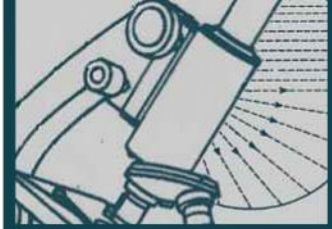


MATT PATTINSON

TESLA'S TOWERING FOLLY

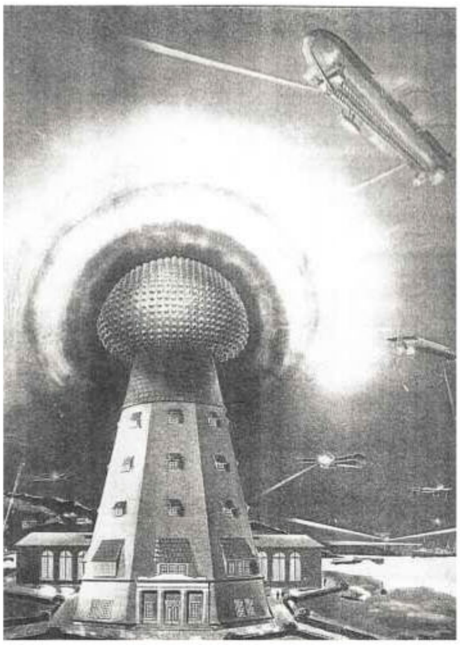
A century ago, Nikola Tesla unveiled his iconic Wardenclyffe tower. Its failure has been blamed on establishment forces, but **DAVID HAMBLING** argues the science was at fault.

One hundred years ago, Nikola Tesla was set to pull off the greatest coup of his career as an electrical inventor. An article in *The Electrical Experimenter Magazine*, which called him "the highest authority in high frequency electrical engineering to-day", described the "wonderful Tesla Oscillator Tower" at Shoreham on Long Island. This was a new type of transmitter that was to change everything. But the iconic 57m (187ft) Wardenclyffe tower was demolished a year later in 1917 without ever working. What went wrong?

The principle behind Wardenclyffe originated with Tesla's work in Colorado Springs some years earlier. Tesla had rigged up an electrical apparatus for tracking lightning, in an area that experienced intense thunderstorms. During one storm, he estimated there were more than 10,000 lightning flashes in a two-hour period, at first almost continuous and then at a rate of 15 to 20 flashes per minute.

Tesla's apparatus sounded an electrical doorbell that rang in response to every lightning strike. There was also a spark gap that Tesla could put his hand inside and feel shocks proportional to the strength of the lightning. As the storm drifted to 50 miles (80km) away, Tesla assumed that it would become undetectable. Instead, the instruments continued to register the lightning flashes. Even when it was well out of sight – Tesla estimated 200 miles (320km) – he could still detect lightning.

Tesla correctly deduced that there was a resonance effect: like a tuning fork that reacts to the right note, something was 'ringing' in response to the long electromagnetic wavelengths of the lightning. Based on the ideas of the time, Tesla came to believe that it was the Earth's own electrical circuit that resonated with the lightning strikes. By creating the right resonance, he believed that standing waves could be produced which could produce electrical effects anywhere on Earth.



THE TOWER WAS DEMOLISHED IN 1917 WITHOUT EVER WORKING

The simplest application involved using the standing waves for communication. Marconi, Tesla's bitter rival in this field, had successfully sent a wireless signal across the Atlantic back in 1901. The Wardenclyffe transmitter would easily trump this by sending signals that could be received "in the utmost confines of the globe."

Marconi's signals dissipated with distance so that sensitive receivers were needed to pick up the signal at any range, but the Wardenclyffe system would be able to deliver vast quantities of power that could be tapped anywhere. Wireless transmission would illuminate cities and roads, with electric lights powered wirelessly. Electrical vehicles would travel down those roads, never needing to refuel or recharge.

The most dramatic use of Wardenclyffe's power was shown on the front cover of *Electrical Experimenter*: dreadnought battleships blown out of the water by electrical energy drawn through their conductive steel shells.

"Tesla, for obvious patent reasons, does not go into details just how whole fleets of a hostile navy can be destroyed in this way by means of powerful electric waves," noted the magazine.

Many still believe that Tesla was fundamentally right, and that his great invention would have worked. Conspiracy theorists hold that the US government, or his powerful and successful rival Edison, were responsible for concealing and/or stealing the technology.

"Nikola Tesla was ruined by elitists and then murdered to prevent him from giving the world free energy," runs a typical headline from one 2014 story. Tesla is a figure revered by the alternative energy movement, the patron saint of unjustly ignored technology. However, subsequent scientific discoveries put the matter in a different light.

The resonance effect was explained in 1952 by Professor Winfried Schumann of the University of Munich. Schumann was looking at the effects of standing waves in spherical capacitors. He realised that the ionosphere in the upper atmosphere would create such a capacitor with the surface of the Earth being the other plate, and calculated that standing waves could be created by electromagnetic signals with a frequency of about eight hertz. This is classed as extremely low frequency, corresponding to radio waves with a wavelength of thousands of miles.

In 1954, Schumann and his colleagues detected waves with the expected frequency, along with their harmonics at various multiples of this frequency, exactly as expected. The waves are produced by global lightning activity, estimated at 50 to 100 strokes a second worldwide. The lightning is concentrated in the afternoon local time in Southeast Asia, Africa and America, so the Schumann Resonance signal goes through a daily cycle with peaks corresponding to maximum thunderstorm activity, the main peak being one around 10pm GMT from American lightning – exactly the lightning that Tesla himself was measuring in Colorado Springs.

Unfortunately, Tesla came to the wrong conclusion. He assumed that it was the Earth that was resonating in response to lightning, as he had not accepted recent ideas about electromagnetic waves. His approach was based on firing electricity deep into the ground to produce resonance, with an elaborate network of underground connections beneath the tower involving a deep well with 16 horizontal pipes radiating out for a hundred metres. The whole gigantic apparatus was designed to make a good electrical connection with the Earth, an approach that was doomed to fail.

Tesla could not get the Earth to resonate, and his backers could not support him indefinitely without results. By the time of the *Electrical Experimenter*'s excitable report, the writing was already on the wall: in the month it was published, Tesla was forced to file for bankruptcy.

What is often overlooked is that Tesla's work at Wardenclyffe was based on genuine weird science. The resonance effect by which Tesla detected distant lightning could have been replicated by anyone using the same set-up. However, like other "damned" scientific data, it was ignored because there was no theoretical explanation. It was only when theory caught up that the resonance effect was rediscovered by mainstream physics.

Tesla's failure was not that he was ahead of his time, but that he failed to properly connect the new phenomenon with known science. To be successful, weird science has to be scientific as well as weird.

For more on Nikola Tesla, see Mark Pilkington, 'The Electric Wizard', **FT217:32-39**.

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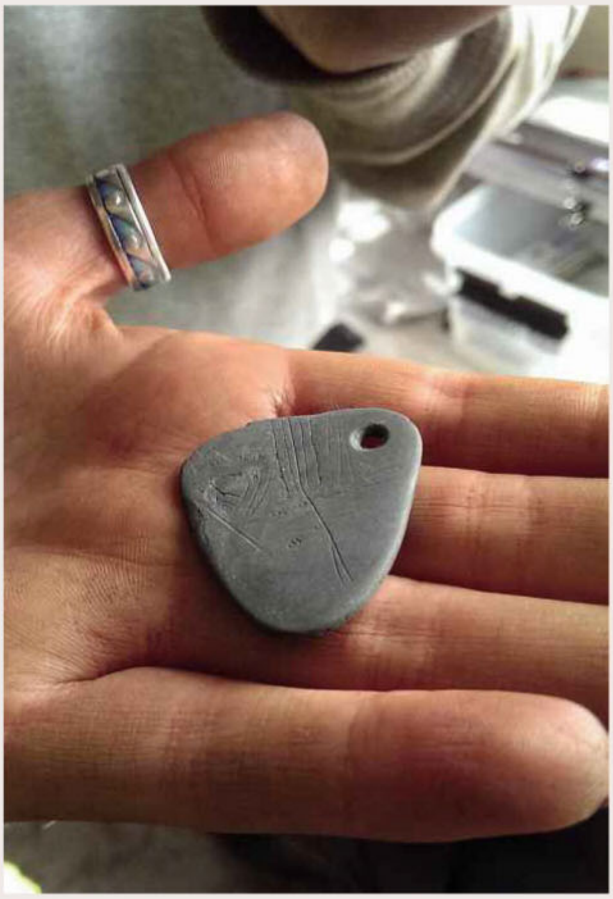
MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING presents our round-up of archæological discoveries, including a mysterious Mesolithic pendant that could have belonged to a shaman and a very early example of an 'eco-house'.

SHAMANIC PENDANT

Star Carr near Scarborough in Yorkshire, Britain's best-preserved Mesolithic site, last year yielded a triangular shale pendant, measuring 31x35x3mm and dated to around 9000 BC, not long after the last Ice Age ended. It is engraved with enigmatic lines that might represent a tree, map, leaf, or possibly tally marks – the earliest known Mesolithic art in Britain. Its style resembles items found in southern Scandinavia, connected to Britain at the time by the now-submerged Doggerland; but no other engraved pendants made of shale are known in Europe. "One possibility is that the pendant belonged to a shaman," said Nicky Milner, professor of archæology at York University. "[Twenty-one] headdresses made of red deer antlers found nearby in earlier excavations are thought to have been worn by shamans... [and] engraved amber pendants found in Denmark have been interpreted as amulets used for spiritual personal protection." *D.Mail, sci-news.com, 26 Feb 2016*.



LEFT: The triangular shale pendant, engraved with enigmatic lines, found at Star Carr near Scarborough.

UNIVERSITY OF YORK / HARRY ROBSON

MESOLITHIC 'ECO-HOUSE'

A Mesolithic dwelling from about 4,300 BC has been unearthed at Blick Mead, Wiltshire, a mile or so from Stonehenge, which it predates by at least 1,300 years. Archæologists have called it an 'eco house' because the base of a fallen tree was used as one of the walls and lined with flints. The pit left by the fallen tree was lined with cobbles, and a wooden post erected 10m (33ft) away to help support a thatched or animal skin roof. A cobbled path led down to a spring where the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers made ritual offerings. Sensibly, they located their fire away from the roof. They kept warm by heating large stones and placing them close to where people slept. These stones "acted like a storage-heater would do now," said project director David Jacques from the University of Buckingham, adding that the discoveries represented a "real paradigm shift" in our knowledge of the Stonehenge landscape. Carbon dating of the post gives a date between 4336 and 4246 BC, although occupancy in the area stretches back to 7600 BC. The 'eco house' measured about 5x3m (16ft x 10ft), and included a 5m^2 (54ft^2) sunken area where animal skins were scraped and cleaned and clothes were made. Other discoveries from the same locality and era include evidence of feasting on aurochs (huge oxen), salmon, trout, hazelnuts and frogs' legs. *Guardian, <i>, 29 Oct 2015*.

THE LINES MIGHT REPRESENT A TREE, MAP, LEAF OR TALLY MARKS

BRITISH MUMMIES

Bronze Age Britons may have mummified their dead by tossing them into peat bogs, wrapping them in bandages, or smoking them over a fire, according to Tom Booth and his team who have studied the bones of scores of ancient people from Kent to Cladh Hallan on South Uist in the Outer Hebrides. The leathery corpses may have been 'curated' in homes for decades and rolled out for special occasions, or (in the absence of land deeds) used to assert families' legal rights to the land their ancestors had worked in the distant past. In some cases mummification was apparently only partially effective, preserving just an arm or a leg. Sometimes the best-preserved parts from different people were cobbled together to form a composite body that was buried later on. When bodies are put straight into graves, gut bacteria leak out and attack the bones, leaving narrow tunnels in them – but such tunnels are not seen in the bones of buried mummies. So far, 16 individuals appear to have been mummified, all dated between 2200 and 750 BC. *Guardian, D.Mail, 1 Oct 2015*.

CARBON DATING AT RISK

Since the 1940s, radiocarbon dating has been used to identify vintages of wine and whisky, uncover art fraud, and accurately determine the ages of thousands of organic artefacts. The technique involves comparing the level of carbon-14, a radioactive form of the element that decays over time, with the level of non-radioactive carbon. Perhaps its most famous application was in dating the Turin Shroud, appearing to show that it was no older than the 13th century AD [**FT51:4**].

Carbon dating is used so widely as to be taken for granted; but an analysis by Heather Graven, a climate-physics researcher at Imperial College London, has found that the rate of fossil-fuel emissions is skewing the carbon ratios used to determine an object's age. Combustion of coal and oil is "diluting the fraction of atmospheric carbon dioxide containing radiocarbon," she said. "This is making the atmosphere appear as though it has 'aged', or lost radiocarbon by radioactive decay occurring over time." By 2050, Graven wrote in a paper published last July in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the large amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will make new organic material appear to be 1,000 years old based on today's carbon-dating models. A new T-shirt would have the same carbon date as William the Conqueror's robe. By the year 2100, the atmosphere will have a radiocarbon age of 2,000 years. If Graven's calculations are correct, in 15 years carbon dating will no longer be reliable. A dramatic reduction in fossil fuel emissions would of course delay this problem. *BBC News, 21 July; theatlantic.com, 24 July 2015.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

198: WHO WRIT IT?

Some paralimpomena from previous survey (**FT274:19**), anciently supplementing Douglas Adams's (No, not *that* Douglas Adams) on-line *Forgeries Bibliography* (sinisterly billed as 'a work in progress'), provoked by Amy Robillard's and Tom Fortune's academic claptrap in the on-line *Journal of Rhetoric, Culture, & Politics* 27 (2007) – You'd do far better with Nick Green's *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (2012).

Starts with Homer, helped and hindered by the ancients having no more idea than we do about his (her? in the *Odyssey*'s case) Who, When, Where. Herodotus (bk2 ch117) realised the Homeric Hymns were largely spurious, also (bk4 ch32) the mock-epic *Madman* – nothing to do with *Mad Men*. Another burlesque fathered on him was the amusing *Battle of the Mice and Frogs.*

An early Homer editor was Onomacritus (c.530 – c.480 BC), a notorious forger of oracles, whose intrusions perverted the Titans' (early Clash Of...) mythological role (Pausanias, bk8 ch37 para5). Whence the theory doggedly pursued by Victorian editor FA Paley (*The Truth about Homer*, 1887) that our *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are fifth-century forgeries.

Thanks to anthologist John Stobæus's quotations (5th-cent. AD), the so-called *Letters of Phalaris* were thought genuine until the masterly demolition job (1697) by the great Cantabrigiensian Richard Bentley. Phalaris was the sixth-century ruler of Sicilian Agrigentum who gave the hitherto respectable term 'Tyrant' a bad name by his cannibalism (suckling infants an especial taste) and roasting enemies alive in a brazen bull, a fate he himself finally met – but (homage to Mr J Rotten) Never Mind The Bullocks...

A treatise on the Athenian Constitution (not Aristotle's homonymous one), purportedly the work of Xenophon, has long been re-assigned for its rabid anti-democratic tirades to 'The Old Oligarch' – sounds classier (apart from the movie) than X The Unknown. Precise date equally unknown. Oxford historian Theodore Wade-Gery puckishly settled on winter 425 because (as conversationally reported by colleague WG Forrest:

Cleon the demagogue read that scoundrels could not be generals, so ran for office and won; Aristophanes read that stage comedians daren't ridicule the People, so wrote his *Knights*; General Demosthenes read that Athens was weak in hoplite infantry, so launched the Delium campaign, featuring (Thucydides, bk4 ch100) a primitive giant flame-thrower; Spartan commander Brasidas read that long marches were impractical (step forward, Mao), so promptly began a successful one. If Wade-Gery was right, never can a fake have launched more genuine innovations.

Strolling down the Sandalarium (Rome's Charing Cross Road), Doctor Galen was startled to see a bookshop advertising his latest work – first he'd heard of it. After recovering, he dashed off a pamphlet *On My Own Books,* a kind of Galen For Dummies showing punters how to recognise the real thing.

Galen was an easy forgers' target as probably (after 'Brazen Gut' Didymus, credited with 3,500 volumes, many of which he eventually forgot) antiquity's most prolific author – 20,000 pages in Kühn's standard edition. Same fate had befallen the celebrated Hippocrates – even his famous Oath (sometimes pronounced the 'Hypocritic') has its doubters.

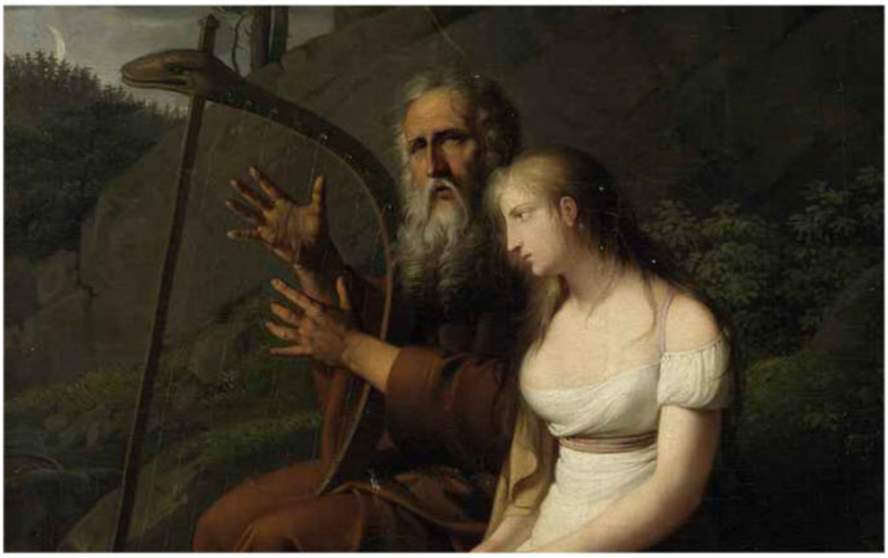
Prefiguring Dan Brown, early Christian literature pullulated with forgeries and disputed attributions, most people's favourite being the so-called Letters exchanged between that precious pair Paul and Seneca; cf. Bart Ehrman's *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemic* (2012). Prime Byzantine example was the corpus of writings ascribed to Paul's convert (Acts 17. 34) Dionysius the Areopagite, theologically influential (e.g. on Angelology) until the Renaissance, when unmasked by humanist scholar Lorenzo Valla (1457).

Since when, every century has thrown up its meed of fakers; cf. the essays (now on-line) by Isaac Disraeli (1766-1848) and Andrew Lang (1844-1912). The eighteenth saw McPherson's invented Scottish bard Ossian (1760, pictured below), until seen off by Samuel Johnson; short-lived (1752-70) poet Thomas Chatterton ('the marvellous boy'), who 'translated' fictitious 'ancient' ones, and after exposure (despite Quintilian's (bk1 ch8) "It is hard to confute books that never existed") died either from suicide with arsenic or bungled self-medication for VD; George Psalmanazar (1679?-1763) who claimed to be the first-ever Formosan in Europe, fabricating for that land an entire history and language. Then came Constantine Simonides (1824-67) – worthy rival for Lovejoy – who both fobbed off collectors with fake Greek manuscripts after seducing them with genuine ones – a canny trick – before turning the tables by claiming he'd forged that biblical classic, the *Codex Sinaiticus*, alleging that he'd planted clues on certain pages – these, when looked for, somehow were always found mutilated.

In 1902 at Paris, Charles Carrington published a translation of Petronius's *Satyricon* under the name Sebastian Melmoth. Sensation: this was the well-known *nom de plume* of Oscar Wilde (cf. Sebastian Tombs, long-term alias of Simon 'The Saint' Templar). But, not actually Dear Oscar's work (Carrington's own, probably), albeit his classics were up to it; cf. Morgan Crouch, *Wilde and Petronius: The Satyricon as Template for Dorian Gray* (2010).

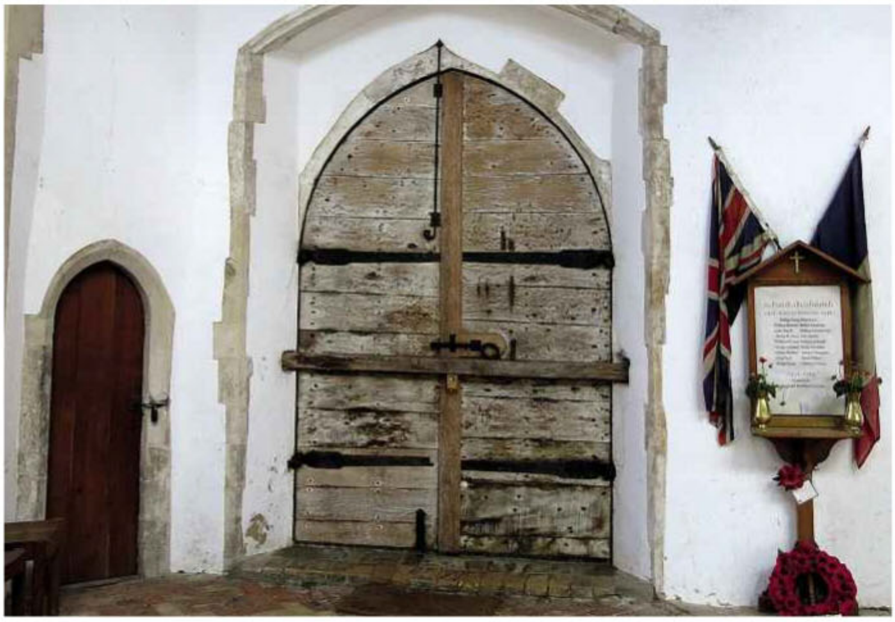
Kudos (of a kind) to one David Bourke who (Internet, natch) by altering the spelling to 'Melmouth' managed to produce the appropriate anagram: Metabolism: The Anus – Wild one, David, but not Wilde enough!

"Imposture merges away into self-deception so that only relatively has there ever been an impostor" – Fort, *Books*, p669, prefacing his account of the great Livy hoax of 1924, updated (**FT135:24**) by Yours Truly, though not Livy-ed with anger.



ALAN MURDIE investigates the phenomenology of Black Dog encounters and apparitions

THE HELLHOUNDS OF EAST ANGLIA



SPENCER MEANS / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: The door of Blythburgh Church, Suffolk, said to bear the marks of Black Shuck's claws.

One moonlit night back in August 1985 or 1986 I was driving from Colchester to Bury St Edmunds with a friend, via some empty country back roads. Somewhere near the Suffolk / Essex border we reached a crossroads, and as we slowed down my friend suddenly exclaimed he could see an enormous dog sitting close to the four-way signpost at the spot. I could see nothing unusual but he was astonished by the size of the creature. He said it was sitting up, close to the signpost, as though guarding something. I found myself thinking of East Anglia's legendary ghost Black Dog, known as Black Shuck, "against which the hound of the Baskervilles was no more than a playful puppy" to quote local writer Ronald Blythe (*Word from Wormingford,* 1996).

Although I had not seen it myself, I felt uneasy for two different reasons. Firstly, I knew my friend enjoyed drinking to excess rather frequently, (I can't remember now but he had probably imbibed that night). Equally I felt a twinge of unease because since the age of 11 I had been aware of how Black Shuck was viewed across Norfolk and Suffolk as a portent of death and disaster, although in Essex – where sightings are rarer – the dog was considered benign. I also found myself recalling another story (told around Lowestoft) that if you do not speak of your encounter for a year, any evil portended might be averted. So although at the same time thinking that the Shuck was very much a superstition, I duly put the incident out of my mind and didn't mention it again. My friend did not die, but nor did he enjoy much luck thereafter. Complications from an accident suffered several years previously soon began to overshadow his life, his drinking got worse and he experienced various misfortunes (though these might have been inevitable in the circumstances). But by that time I had reassured myself that books telling stories of the Shuck all belonged in the folklore section, and the subjectivity of my friend's experience and the surrounding circumstances meant for me it could not constitute conclusive proof of anything paranormal.

Some 10 years later – I can date the event precisely to the afternoon of Thursday, 9th March 1995 – I was with a girlfriend travelling back from Bristol where I had been giving a lecture the night before (on local government finance – nothing ghostly!). As we passed through Wiltshire we took a diversion to Avebury, famous for its enormous prehistoric stone circle. My girlfriend was not really interested in the site but she had a perfunctory look around and waited patiently whilst I visited a small museum (now closed). About 3.30pm on a clear afternoon, after a further look at the stones, we were walking back to our car when from out of the hedge came a large black panther, which crossed the road, stopped and crouched by the verge. We both saw it, and my girlfriend was alarmed. However, I was fascinated and, despite her protests I walked towards it, foolhardy as it might seem. As I approached it the panther took off, with the loping movement of a big cat, and then swerved to the left and seemed to melt into the hedge – it just seemed to vanish. Then a little further down the beast emerged again, ran a little further down the road, and then disappeared into the hedge once more.

THE BLACK DOG ENCOUNTER IS AN ENIGMATIC PHENOMENON

At this point, it was again a case of mixed feelings. As with the experience 10 or so years before, I began wondering if this might be some kind of bad omen, evoking the same sense of unease. At the same time I was rather pleased to have witnessed one of these 'Beast of Bodmin' creatures or ABCs (Alien Big Cats) as they are dubbed, and I was convinced what we had seen was a living creature, not some kind of wraith. I didn't mention these thoughts to my girlfriend who seemed to want to dismiss it as nothing important and was keen for us to leave for London. I did not see her the next day, but on the Saturday I came round to her flat to find her in tears. She had just received the shocking news that her cousin, a church minister aged 45, had been murdered by robbers in the Caribbean. This had occurred two days earlier, on the Thursday we had seen the big cat. I never told her of my thoughts or speculation, or the idea of some folklore scholars that ABCs have replaced the Black Dog in modern times.

Examining my two experiences in what is deemed a rationalistic way, I find neither convinces me as evidence of anything paranormal. For me, the sighting of the ABC in March 1995 involved a live, physical animal, not a ghost or supernatural entity, and there are too many alternative explanations that might be postulated for both incidents which are impossible to exclude.

When I talked about the incident to the rationalist ghost hunter Andrew Green (1927-2004) a couple of years later, mentioning the close connection in time between the sighting and the murder of my girlfriend's cousin, his dry response was simply 'coincidence'. It probably was. But the close proximity in time of such a sighting and of one of us learning so soon of a wholly unexpected violent death that occurred the same day, still makes me wonder if there was some link, perhaps an example of Jungian synchronicity. Whatever the case, it provides a ready example of the way anomalous experiences are socially constructed as well as illustrating how a portion of my own mind may be prone to a mode of thought deemed primitive and archaic in conventional circles.

I was inspired to reflect upon these two experiences by the publication of a new book, *Padfoot: A Supernatural History* (2015) by veteran forteans the Revd. Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe, who have taken an interest for many years in such sightings. Phantom Black Dogs can be distinguished from ordinary domestic canines by their size or anomalous characteristics, such as large luminous eyes or strange behaviour. The idea that large black cats might be interchangeable with phantom dogs is one that *Padfoot* reflects, though this idea was already in circulation in 1965 in Dorset at the Verne (see *Ghosts and Legends of the Dorset Countryside*, 1977, by Edward Waring). Importantly, *Padfoot* does not confine itself to material from the UK but provides an international survey of legends, beliefs and experiences showing that what a Black Dog may represent in one area can be very different in another.

The book joins a growing and impressive collection of research devoted to Black Dog experiences (for example works by Bob Trubshaw, Jeremy Harte, Dr Simon Sherwood and Mark Norman, drawing on earlier folklore studies by Theo Brown, Ethel Rudkin, Ruth St Leger Gordon, and others). Early editions of *Fortean Times* featured Black Shuck sightings from East Anglia collected by Ivan Bunn of Lowestoft and *FT* has reported many examples in the decades since. Yet despite the attention of scholars, folklorists, cryptozoologists, ghost hunters and parapsychologists, the Black Dog or Alien Big Cat experience remains an enigmatic phenomenon which we are still no further forward in understanding than when Janet and Colin Bord logged global sightings in their *Alien Animals in* 1980.

If there is a fixed idea or message behind this exhaustive coverage of global Black Dog sightings, wrapped as they are in a variety of general moulding influences such as cultural expectations, the demand on witnesses to tell stories matching expectations, and the transference of viewpoints from collectors, it is that we know neither their cause nor what they are about. We lack any paradigm for making sense of Black Dogs that provides a testable hypothesis.

The rate at which Black Dogs sightings are reported as ghosts seems to be a consistent one, at least regarding cases that make it into the press. Unlike the ordinary domestic ghost – which can be examined from a range of perspectives – Black Dog phantoms occur predominantly outdoors and in rural places. From examinations of reports of apparitions and hauntings in the press carried by the *Journal of Paraphysics* in 1967-1974 and by the Spontaneous Cases Committee of the Society for Psychical Research in 2007, perhaps two to three per cent of reports feature the apparition of an animal (cats, dogs or horses) and perhaps one per cent involves a phantom Black Dog. In just over 250 personal accounts I collected between 1998 and 2006 from people convinced they had experienced 'a ghost', only one involved a phantom Black Dog (during this period I also received a single account of an ABC type animal in Cambridgeshire). But trying to come up with anything approaching a meaningful statistic in this area is a quixotic exercise, as with the attempt by criminologist Sir Leon Radzinowicz a trying to estimate the 'dark figure' of unreported crime. Many encounters go unrecorded and quite possibly many are perceived, reported and dismissed as something else.

Whilst it is possible that Black Dogs might once have had an organic basis (as with the apparitions of deceased human beings), attempting Linnean-style classifications modelled on standard biological science is inappropriate given the importance that subjective meanings play in sightings. Furthermore, Black Dogs display features going beyond the recognised capacities of known cats and dogs or living organisms in general – such as the ability to vanish, shape-shift, and pass through solid objects.

Whilst with my two experiences, I already knew something of English Black Dog traditions, I do not think either of my companions were familiar with them, nor would not have been much interested; my girlfriend later played down the Avebury encounter by saying it was just an ordinary cat that appeared bigger for some reason, though she did not explain how.

What is the relationship between the witness and the rest of reality at the moment when the Black Dog is perceived? Unfortunately, parapsychology is currently unable to shed light on mechanisms (i.e. 'How is paranormal information transmitted?'). Witnesses encountering Black Dogs appear to be awake, alert and often travelling somewhere, a very different position to states of relaxation and sensory deprivation achieved with the psi-conducive Ganzfeld technique in laboratories. However, science progresses by asking new questions; so perhaps new insights may arise by adopting a new paradigm to investigate the phenomenology of such encounters, a study of the human structures of consciousness, perception and experience which operate when Black Dogs are 'seen'.

Examining what may be gleaned or inferred from accounts of the states of mind of Black Dog witnesses, the following aspects could be explored:

* *Alterations in thinking.* Changes in concentration, attention, memory and judgement are common. Archaic modes of thought appear and reality-testing is impaired. Ordinary Western distinctions of cause and effect become blurred, and ambivalence allowing incongruities of opposites can coexist without recognising the inconsistency.

* *Disturbed time sense.* How do witnesses appreciate time when sightings occur? Black Dogs often remain visible for much longer than typical apparitions. Witnesses have feelings of time slowing down or coming to a standstill, or sensations of watching events outside themselves, all of which are components in other anomalous experiences.

* *Changes in emotional expression.* Emotional extremes are present in accounts, ranging from fear to relief when, for instance a dog has acted as a guardian.

* *Perceptual disturbances.* Witnesses have reported strange luminosities, flames, sparks and electrical discharges surrounding Black Dogs, along with distorted perceptions of the dogs themselves. Are these hallucinatory aspects of the experience?

* *Meaning or significance.* Witnesses may attach an increased meaning or significance to their experiences, ideas or perceptions. A sighting may have a veridical character that transforms the subject's attitudes and philosophy and may set them on a quest to discover more about such experiences. In some, but not all, the sighting is attached to both a major negative event but also seemingly trivial incidents. For example, in 1970 after a ghostly dog was seen vanishing in a farm house kitchen on the Isle of Hoy, strange banging sounds were heard at the house which the witness linked with the unexpected death of her mother three weeks later. (See 'The Black Dog' in *Ghosts Over Britain*, 1976, by Peter Moss).

* *Loss of control.* The dog takes centre stage in these encounters and the human observer is forced into reacting to a situation thrust upon him or (more rarely) her. Black Dogs are not uniformly malign or evil but can be perplexing or unsettling; how a witness feels about dogs and cats on a mundane level may feature in accounts. "Lover of dogs that I am… I was unwilling to approach closer," wrote John Harries after a mysterious dog followed him one moonlit night in Norfolk in November 1945, the creature being observed after "a premonition made me glance back". (*The Ghost Hunter's Road Book*, 1968).

These are but a few suggestions as to how research could develop. Long ago the Psalmist wrote: "Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog!" (Psalm 22:20). Studying the role of human consciousness in relation to the Black Dog experience may help shed light on these puzzling experiences, bring comfort and reassurance to witnesses, and be a step towards the fulfilment of the Psalmist's ancient prayer.

ALEX TOMLINSON

GRAVE MISGIVINGS

Back from the dead, coffin mix-ups, and a fortean porn video disaster at a Cardiff crematorium...

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

STILL KICKING

A woman shocked her husband by turning up at her own funeral after he had paid hit men $7,000 to kill her. Noela Rukundo (pictured below) waited outside her house in Melbourne, Australia, where mourners had gathered for the chance to confront Balenga Kalala. He tried to have her killed when she returned last year to her home country of Burundi, central Africa, for her stepmother's funeral. "When I got out of the car, he saw me straight away," said Rukundo. "He put his hands on his head and said, 'Is it my eyes? Is it a ghost?' I replied, 'Surprise! I'm still alive!' He kept talking to himself and when he reached me, he touched me on the shoulder. He jumped. Then he said, 'Nola, is it you?' Then he started screaming, 'I'm sorry for everything'. I felt like somebody who has risen again."

Rukundo said she had been resting at her hotel in Bujumbura, the Burundian capital, after the funeral last January when Kalala called her from their home in Australia and suggested she get some fresh air. Moments after stepping outside, she was forced into a car by an armed man and driven across the city to a building where she was tied to a chair. She heard the gang leader tell Kalala on the phone: "We already have her". The phone was put on loudspeaker for Rukundo to hear her husband reply: "Kill her". Then they described for him where they were going to chuck the body.

However, after two days the kidnappers let her go, saying they didn't kill women and children. They extorted more money from Kalala, telling him his wife of 10 years was dead, while instructing her to tell other women not to stay with their violent husbands. They gave her memory cards with recordings of Kalala organising the contract killing, as well as Western Union money transfer receipts. The mother of eight returned to Melbourne on 22 February, and Kalala later made a full confession to his wife, captured on tape, begging for her forgiveness. "He said he wanted to kill me because he was jealous," she said. "He thought that I wanted to leave him for another man." She rejected the accusation.

> "I felt like somebody who has risen again"

Born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kalala had arrived in Australia in 2004 as a refugee, after fleeing a rebel army that had rampaged through his village, killing his wife and young son. Settling in Melbourne, he found employment first in a seafood processing factory and then in a warehouse as a forklift operator. "He could already speak English," recalls Rukundo, who also arrived in Australia in 2004. "My social worker was his social worker, and they used him to translate Swahili." The two fell in love. Rukundo had five children from a previous relationship and went on to have three more with Kalala.

Kalala has now been jailed for nine years, after pleading guilty to incitement to murder. Rukundo moved away from her old home after some members of the local African community criticised her for her husband's conviction. "My situation, my past life? That is gone," she said. "I will stand up like a strong woman." *dailymail.co.uk, telegraph.co.uk, 5 Feb 2016.*

● Investigators presumed a man had been killed when his truck collided with a four-wheel drive on the Glenelg Highway near Tarrington, in the Australian state of Victoria, at about 6am on 9 February. The 26-year-old South Australian man driving the 4WD died at the scene, east of Hamilton, and his 17-year-old male passenger was flown to hospital, where he was fighting for his life. Evidence at the crash site suggested the Melbourne-bound four-wheel drive had crossed onto the wrong side of the road and collided with the front of the truck. It appeared the truck driver, who was driving towards Hamilton, was trying to avoid the four-wheel drive when it left the road.

The truck burst into flames and police believed the driver's body was trapped inside its charred wreckage. However, at 4pm on 10 February, the truck driver, a 51-year-old man from Glen Waverley, turned up on farmer Graeme Presser's property in Penshurst, 10 miles (16k) southeast of the crash site. Prosser was looking for parts in a shed when the truck driver approached him. "I didn't see him, I must have woken him up," he said. He was taken to hospital with injuries, including burns to his body. At the time of the news report he was in a stable condition, but had not recovered enough to be interviewed. "There's some 34 hours when we don't know where he's been," said

Senior Sergeant Mark Amos. "It's a significant distance to walk, particularly after being involved in such a big crash." *(Melbourne) Age online, 11+17 Feb 2016.*

- Edgar Latulip, 21, went missing from a rooming house in the Canadian town of Kitchener, southern Ontario, on 2 September 1986. His mother Sylvia Wilson had last seen him in hospital, where he was recovering from a failed suicide attempt. He was said to have a developmental delay that gave him the mental capacity of a 12-year-old. At first, he headed for Niagara Falls by bus without his medication. This, and the fact that Niagara Falls was a popular suicide spot, led officials to suspect that he had committed suicide. Exhaustive police searches failed to find him alive or dead, despite one reported sighting in 1993 in Hamilton, Ontario. His mother gave up all hope of ever seeing him again. Investigators circulated missing persons posters of Latulip for years. Mock-up photos of an older Latulip showed a man with a big grin and wire glasses.

Last February, nearly three decades on, Latulip started having flashbacks following what appears to have been a fugue, a catastrophic loss of memory. Now aged 50, he told his social worker that he could suddenly recall segments of his forgotten past – including his given name. Searching online, the social worker found a missing persons poster and alerted the Niagara Regional Police Department. A DNA test confirmed his suspicions on 5 February and authorities were working to reunite Latulip with his relatives. He had been living under a new identity in St Catharines, 80 miles (130km) from his hometown. Local police say it is the longest period they have encountered of someone going missing before finally being discovered.

Detectives believe he experienced amnesia after suffering a head injury soon after taking the bus to Niagara Falls. Then somehow he made it to St Catharines, less than 20 miles (32km) away. To protect Latulip's privacy, authorities said that they would not reveal details about his new life – whether he had a job, a home or a family. *[CNN] dailymail.co.uk, 11 Feb; [AP] telegraph.co.uk, 13 Feb 2016.*

- A 46-year-old Turkish man mistakenly listed as dead by authorities spent a decade fighting to prove he is alive. Sinan Avci, who lives in Erzurum province, was forced into an early retirement in 2003 after being diagnosed with epilepsy. The former worker discovered that Turkey's Social Security Fund (SSK) had listed him as dead in 2004 when he failed to withdraw his disability pension. He said he could not work both due to his illness and since he no longer officially existed. Referred to by locals as "Sinan, the dead," he mostly relied for year on financial help from relatives and neighbours. After a 10-year legal battle, he finally managed last July to convince the authorities that he was not dead; but he faced another struggle trying to get his unpaid salary and the right to disability benefits back. "What else should I do? I proved that I'm alive but should I now cut my arms or legs to prove I'm disabled?" he said, crying. He also called on the authorities to investigate the people who reported his death. *[AFP] 5 July 2015.*

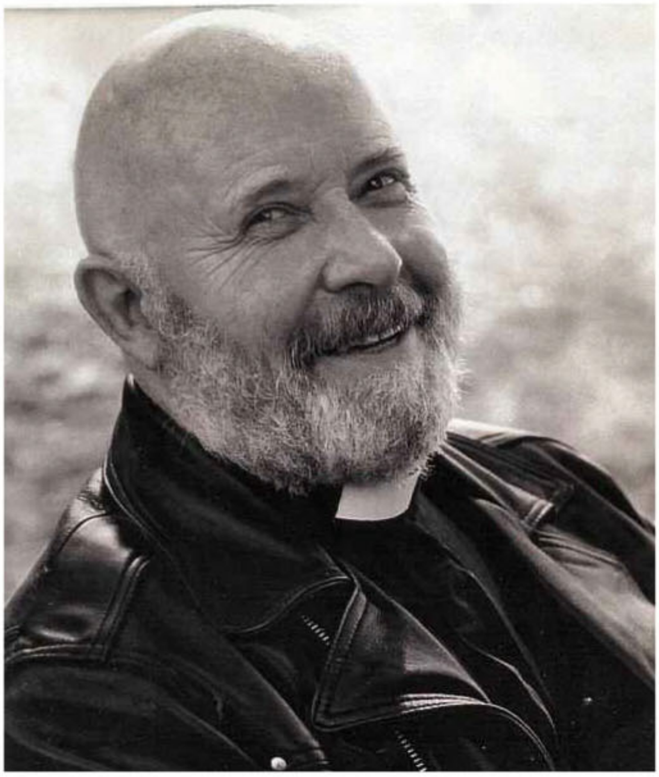
FUNERAL SURPRISES

Hundreds of people gathered at Thornhill Crematorium in Cardiff on 27 January to pay their respects to Simon Lewis, 33, and his baby son, who were killed in a head-on collision on New Year's Eve. The service was conducted by the Rev Lionel Fanthorpe (right), 80, the 'biker priest' who presented Rapido TV's *Fortean TV* (broadcast on Channel 4, 1997-98), sometime president of BUFORA (British UFO Research Association), and current president of ASSAP (the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena). Rev Fanthorpe had intended to play a tribute video made in remembrance of Mr Lewis, but instead a hardcore pornographic video came on the big screen behind him. Everyone was in shock, said an unnamed funeral-goer. It took staff nearly four minutes to summon an engineer who could turn it off.

"We are carrying out an urgent investigation," said a Cardiff council spokesman. "There were four television screens used. The TV screen that showed the inappropriate content was recently installed, to replace one that was broken. We are trying to establish whether the smart TV could have picked up a broadcast by accident from bluetooth or a wifi connection. The other TVs were not affected. We are clear that it is not possible for any member of staff to play or download anything onto the computer to be shown on the screen. The screen has now been disconnected. We would like to take the opportunity to extend our sincere apologies to the family and friends." *telegraph.co.uk, 28 Jan 2016.*

- A woman was stunned when her father came home alive and well – two months after the family held his funeral and cremated him. Last December, Miguel De Luna, 74, left his home in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, and went on a drinking spree. A few weeks later the family were notified that a badly decomposed body had been found. They were unable to identify the corpse but assumed it was their father. Then on 26 February Miguel turned up for a reunion with his family, saying he had just "been walking". *Sun, D.Star, 27 Feb 2016.*

- A grandmother presumed dead by her family turned up alive on the day of her funeral. Hospital staff in Sao Jose dos Campos, Brazil, had put Maria da Silva's name on the death certificate of another old lady. After finding the stranger's corpse in the coffin, relatives rushed to the hospital and saw stroke patient Maria, 80, happily chatting away. "It's very traumatic," said her son Flavio, 51, who had spent £200 on a headstone. "Someone needs to be punished." *D.Mirror, 25 Mar 2015.*



FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Siberian hermit airlifted to hospital, hell house demolished, and sperm hunters on the prowl...

BACK TO THE WILDERNESS [FT45:52]

Fortean Times
PHANTOM ATTACKERS

Agafya Lykov (or Lykova), 72, a Siberian hermit, notified medical authorities of leg pain via satellite phone and was airlifted to hospital in Tashtagol, Kemerovo Oblast, for treatment. She was discharged on 19 January, ready to be airlifted home to solitude and subzero temperatures. Her father, Karp Osipovich Lykov, began his flight from civilisation in 1922. He was a member of the Old Believers movement, based on Russian Orthodox teachings from before the reign of Peter the Great (1672-1725), whom Lykov described as "the Antichrist in human form". He felt obliged to shun all contact with Christian revisionists, let alone Bolsheviks. Moving from village to village during the next decade with his wife Akulina and their two small children, he finally left society in 1936 after a Communist patrol shot his brother. He retreated to the wilds of the Siberian Taiga, and built a log cabin into the side of a hill above the Abakan river. It was more than 150 miles (240km) to the nearest settlement, through dense forest. Two more children were born in the wild, Agafya on 16 April 1944. In 1961 a hard frost killed everything in their garden and by spring they were reduced to eating shoes and bark. Akulina died of starvation on 16 February. As Mike Dash relates, "The rest of the family were saved by what they regarded as a miracle: a single grain of rye sprouted in their pea patch. The Lykovs put up a fence around the shoot and guarded it zealously night and day to keep off mice and squirrels. At harvest time, the solitary spike yielded 18 grains, and from this they painstakingly rebuilt their rye crop." [*Smithsonian Magazine,* 28 Jan 2013.]

The Lykovs lived without meeting another soul for 42 years, surviving waist-deep snow and temperatures of minus 50°C (minus 58°F). They had no books except for a family Bible and prayerbooks; on discovery, the children could read, but their speech was difficult to understand. Their principal entertainment, the Russian journalist Vasily Peskov noted, "was for everyone to recount their dreams". They had birch-bark galoshes and dressed in hemp cloth grown from seed and made with a crude spinning wheel. They lived on potatoes, onions and turnips from their garden and nuts and berries from the forest; but once their kettles had rusted away, cooking became more difficult. In fact, they were perennially on the edge of starvation. They slept on dry leaves and made fire by rubbing stones together.

In 1978, Soviet geologists on their way to Siberian oil deposits by helicopter noticed cultivation and discovered the "Stone Age family", who had not heard of World War II. In late 1981, three of the children died within days of each other – Savin (56) and Natalia (46) from kidney failure, Dmitri (40) from pneumonia. Karp himself, white-bearded and exceptionally vigorous for his age, soldiered on until 16 February 1988, when he died in his sleep aged 90, 27 years to the day after his wife. In the 1980s, shortly after press reports turned the family into a national phenomenon, the Soviet government paid for Agafya to tour Russia for a month, during which time she saw planes, horses, cars and money for the first time. Since then she has only left her remote homestead high above the Abakan river to visit distant relatives, meet other Old Believers, or for medical treatment. *Guardian, 20 Jan 2016.*

ABOVE: Agafya, now back in the Siberian Taiga after her visit to hospital.

HELL IN THE PACIFIC [FT312:20]

ForteanTimes

An El Salvadoran fisherman who survived at sea for 438 days is being sued by his shipmate's family for allegedly eating him to survive. José Salvador Alvarenga, 37, is the first person in recorded history to have survived in a small boat lost at sea for more than a year. On 30 January 2014 he was found, weather-beaten and dehydrated, on an atoll in the Marshall Islands, some 6,500 miles (10,500km) from Mexico where he had set off, accompanied by Ezekiel Cordoba, on 17 November 2012. Alvarenga had paid 22-year-old Cordoba $50 to accompany him on the fishing trip, but the latter did not survive the voyage. Now Cordoba's family is suing Alvarenga for $1 million, claiming that he ate him while they were adrift at sea. Alvarenga claimed that he had survived by eating fish and birds, as well as drinking rainwater, turtle blood and urine. He said Cordoba died after four months because he couldn't digest the raw meat they were eating. The younger man's emotional state deteriorated, and he tried to throw himself overboard. He fell ill after eating a bird, which the partners later found had a venomous sea snake in its gut. Cordoba's body has never been found.

"His departure was very hard for me, and I continued talking to him," said Alvarenga. "On the sixth day I realised that I was going crazy, so I prayed for him and threw the body into the water." Before he died, Cordoba made Alvarenga promise not to eat his corpse and, if he survived, to find his mother and tell her what had happened. Alvarenga kept his second promise. At the time, Ezekiel Cordoba's mother, Rosalia Diaz Cueto, did not blame Alvarenga for her son's death. Now all that has changed. Because it's a civil lawsuit, Alvarenga has not been charged with any crimes and Ricardo Cucalon, his lawyer, thinks that the suit is financially motivated as it follows the October release of *438 Days: An Extraordinary True Story of Survival at Sea* by Jonathan Franklin. Cordoba's family had earlier demanded 50 per cent of the royalties before making the claim about cannibalism. "Many believe the book is making my client a rich man," said Cucalon, "but what he will earn is much less than people think." At the time of the reports, the book had sold only 1,500 copies in the US. *NY Daily News (online), 15 Dec; Times, D.Mail, 16 Dec; home.bt.com, 18 Dec 2015.*

HELL HOUSE RAZED [FT313:46-53]

ForteanTimes
40
THE EXORCIST

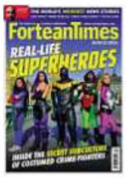
Latoya Ammons, living in a house in Gary, Indiana, with her three children, reported a wide range of paranormal phenomena including strange sounds, poltergeist annoyance, and multiple possessions. One of her children levitated and another apparently walked backwards up a wall. The house, dubbed a 'portal to Hell' by the press, was bought by ghost hunter Zak Bagans, who has now torn it down as part of a documentary he plans to release later this year. "Something was inside that house that had the ability to do things that I have never seen before," said Bagans, "things that others carrying the highest forms of credibility [sic] couldn't explain either. There was something there that was very dark yet highly intelligent and powerful." *[AP] 4 Feb 2016.*

SPERM MUGGERS [FT337:8]

ForteanTimes
Wuthering Frights

Three women kidnapped a hitchhiker near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, and forced him into sex to steal his sperm – or "harvest his DNA" as the New Zealand report phrased it. They drove up to the man, abducted him and took turns to sexually assault him. It was not explained how the man was aroused to enable him to have sex against his will. Sperm is said to be highly prized by witchdoctors, who use it for *juju* – traditional rituals to bring good fortune, boost business or prevent a criminal being detected. Reports of female "sperm hunters" (typically in groups of three) have circulated in Zimbabwe at least since 2009 [**FT289:5**] – and, as we reported, one victim was abducted in Port Elisabeth, South Africa, last May. Back in 2002, a man in Kraaifontein, South Africa, was accosted by a stranger who lured him to his house with an offer of food. Once there, he was locked in and forced to ejaculate into a jar before being allowed to leave]**FT167:10**]. A 2011 report from South Africa claimed a condom full of semen could fetch as much as £250. *Sun, 26 Feb; Adelaide Advertiser, 27 Feb 2016.*

GETTING STUCK IN [FT314:14]



A prostitute was taken to hospital in China to be surgically removed from an elderly man who died during sexual intercourse. Crowds filmed her on top of the corpse – a blanket protecting their modesty – as they were wheeled to an ambulance. The sudden death sparked *penis captivus* (captive pecker) in which the vagina's muscles lock onto the male organ harder than usual. Surgeons took hours to separate the pair. Two years ago, according to our source (*Sun*, 5 Feb 2016), Italian doctors performed a similar operation on a couple, "both very much alive" – though no report of this reached Fortean Towers at the time.

FINDERS KEEPERS [FT334:12]

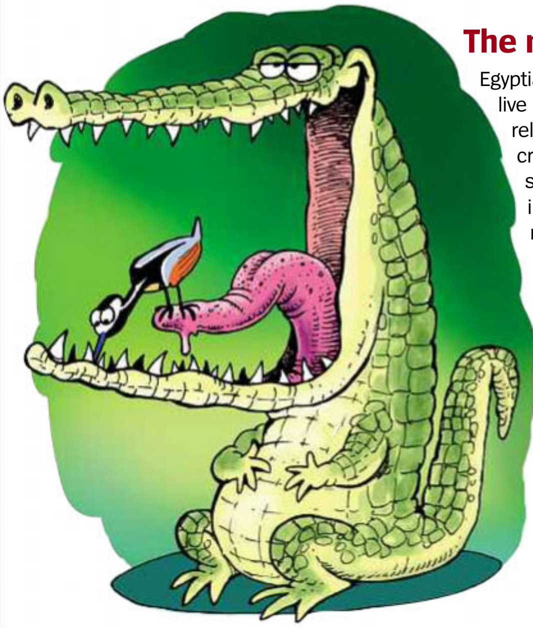
ForteanTimes

Last August, an unnamed 16-year-old girl found a 500g (17oz) gold bar (currently worth about £13,000) while swimming in Königssee, an Alpine lake on the Bavarian border with Austria, not far from the Berghof, Hitler s holiday home in Obersalzberg. She has now been allowed to keep it after a six-month investigation failed to identify the owner. The bar's identity number had been defaced, but officials managed to restore it. *BBC News, 4 Feb 2016.*

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

100: CROCODILE BIRDS



The myth

Egyptian Plovers live in a symbiotic relationship with crocodiles. They stroll about in the croc's mouth, quite unmolested, picking scraps of meat out from between the beast's teeth. The bird gets a meal, while the crocodile gets dental hygiene.

The "truth"

Yes, I know you've seen photos of this actually happening. So have I. But what we've never seen, apparently, is an *undoctored* photo or film of it. There are likewise no reliable eyewitness accounts of the practice. Crocodile experts (and bird experts, come to that) generally consider the idea unlikely, and point out that if it were real, then surely it would have been captured on film by now – or, at the very least, there would be authoritative reports of it happening. Oh, and one other thing – crocodiles don't get food caught between their teeth, because the teeth are too well spaced for that to be possible. The story is a very old one, having been reported by the Greek historian Herodotus (fifth century BC), and then revived in the 19th century. In some versions, it's leeches, rather than meat morsels, that the birds are removing, but this variation runs up against the same basic problem: namely that no one has ever seen it happening. Or at least, no one that anyone believes.

Sources

www.birdorable.com/blog/the-myth-of-the-crocodile-bird; http://crocodilian.blogspot.co.uk/2009/09/crocodile-myths-1-curious-trochilus.html

Disclaimer

Accusing Herodotus of talking total nanas is not something this column does lightly. If you know of any shreds of evidence that might give this tale a bit of bite, please fly over to the letters page.

Mythchaser

It's usually thought that the reason the UK's nuclear bunkers have, over recent decades, been decommissioned and sold off, or repurposed, is because, following the end of the Cold War, they're no longer needed. But there's an alternative explanation – the bunkers aren't redundant, they're obsolete; modern nuclear weapons are so powerful that no bunker could withstand them. Can anyone confirm this as truth, or else vaporise it as myth?

DON'T MISS MYTHCONCEPTIONS THE BOOK
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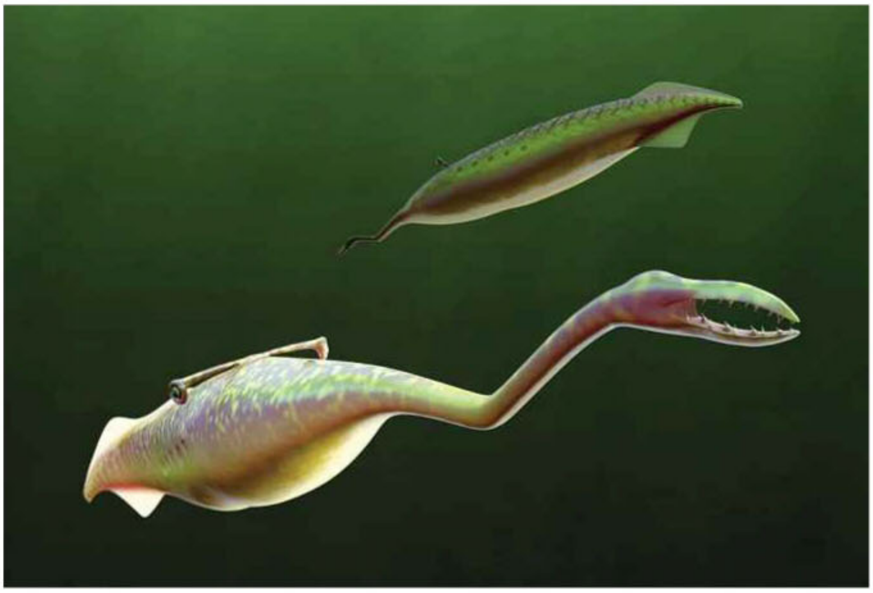
ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden



ABOVE: Tullimonstrum gregarium was put forward by FW Holiday as an ancestor of the Loch Ness Monster.

SEAM MCMAHON / YALE UNIVERSITY

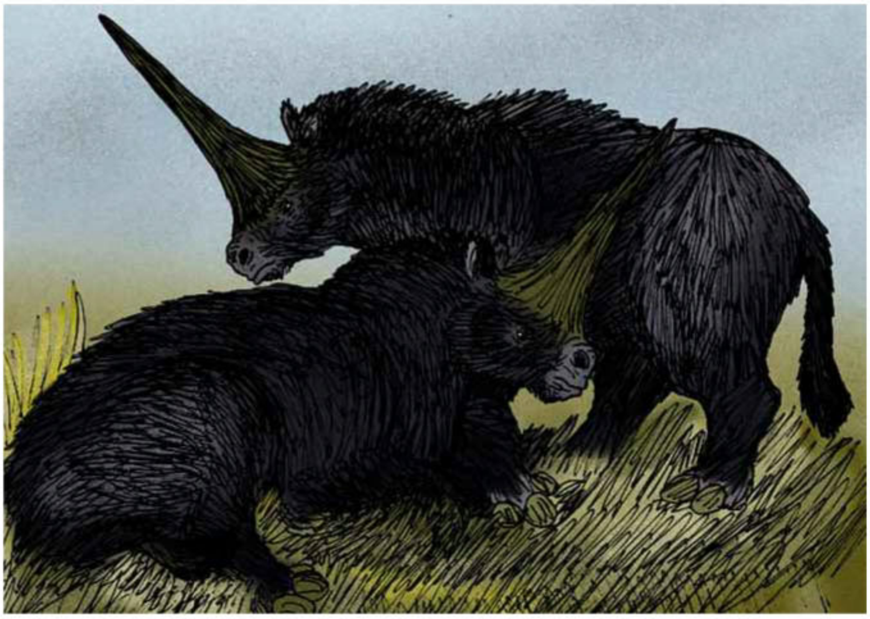
TULLY MONSTER IDENTIFIED

In his classic book *The Great Orm of Loch Ness* (1969), FW Holiday nominated a particularly unusual animal as his favoured Nessie: a hypothetical giant modern-day descendant of a bizarre prehistoric worm-like creature called *Tullimonstrum gregarium*, or the Tully monster (after Francis J Tully, who brought this enigmatic species to scientific attention in 1955). What intrigued Holiday about it was its unexpectedly Nessie-esque morphology. Unlike more conservative vermiform creatures, *Tullimonstrum* sported a pair of small anterior flipper-like appendages (though these are now known to have been eye-stalks), a pair of cuttlefish-like fins at the rear portion of its body, and a very long, slender jaw-containing a proboscis superficially resembling an elongate LNM-type neck and head. However, unlike Nessie, which is often claimed to measure around 30ft (9m) long, *Tullimonstrum* was no more than 1ft (30cm), is known only from Illinois, and became extinct over 300 million years ago, during the late Carboniferous period – all of which no doubt explains why this identity never captured the public imagination. Nevertheless, the Tully monster itself remained highly intriguing, because for several decades no one could decide exactly what it was, taxonomically speaking. However, a team of scientists featuring Dr Victoria E McCoy, formerly of Yale University, announced via a *Nature* paper published online on 16 March 2016 that, following detailed morphological studies of more than 1,200 *Tullimonstrum* fossils, using synchrotron elemental mapping and other new analytical techniques, they had discovered that this small but very controversial creature had possessed a notochord. This is a flexible anterioposterior rod composed of cartilage-like material usually sited dorsally. It is a diagnostic feature of all chordates (i.e. vertebrates plus a few minor groups), forming the basis of the backbone. Moreover, the team considers that it belonged to the same specific vertebrate lineage as the lampreys. The mystery of *Tullimonstrum*'s identity was finally solved, whereas that of Nessie's identity remains another matter entirely. *www.nature.com/nature/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nature16992.html 16 Mar 2016; www.sci-news.com/paleontology/mystery-tully-monster-tullimonstrum-gregarium-03708.html 17 Mar 2016.*

DID MAN MEET MEGA-UNICORN?

The traditional lore of Siberia's Evenk people tells of a huge black bull-like creature bearing a single round, thick, tapering horn of immense size upon the middle of its head. This notoriously belligerent beast would charge at any Evenk rider that it spied, tossing the unfortunate man into the air if it could reach him, and spearing him when he fell back down to earth until he died. Moreover, its horn was so large and heavy that if one of these mega-unicorns were killed, the horn alone needed an entire sledge to transport it. Could this awesome but ostensibly fictitious animal have been inspired at least in part by a living species? Down through the years, several cryptozoological writers have pondered this, including veteran chronicler Willy Ley. He suggested a certain gigantic prehistoric rhinoceros known as *Elasmotherium sibiricum*, which was indeed notable for bearing its single enormous horn upon the very centre of its brow. Up to 15ft (4.6m) long and standing over 6.5ft (2m) at the shoulder, *E. sibiricum* was a massive creature, and sported proportionately long legs (at least for a rhinoceros).

The last member of its genus, it survived in Russia's Siberian territory until around 350,000 years ago, during the late Pleistocene epoch. However, it is now known to have persisted until at least as recently as 27,000 years ago further south, in Kazakhstan's Pavlodar Priirtysh Region, part of the southern West Siberian Plain, thanks to the unexpected discovery there of *Elasmotherium* skull fragments dated by a team of Russian and Kazakh researchers, who published their findings in the *American Journal of Applied Sciences* (March 2016). Suddenly, Ley's hypothesis of this spectacular rhino's survival for a time alongside modern humans seems neither impossible nor even overly implausible, and, in turn, suggests that even the legendary unicorn itself may have a basis in fact. Certainly, a huge gracile rhinoceros bearing a gargantuan horn, not upon its snout's nasal bones like all known living rhino species today, but upon its brow's frontal bones, might well make a very convincing giant unicorn. And indeed, *Elasmotherium* nowadays is commonly referred to informally as "the giant unicorn". *http://thescipub.com/PDF/ajassp.2016.189.199.pdf Mar 2016; http://phys.org/news/2016-03-siberian-unicorn.html 21 Mar 2016.*



ABOVE: An artist's reconstruction of *Elasmotherium sibiricum*.

STANTON F FINK

AQUA VELVAS
GHOST TOWN (REDCAR)
NEW SINGLE ON ITUNES
AQUAVELVAS.CO.UK

NECROLOG

We say goodbye to post-Soviet Russia's most famous faith healer, a celebrated outsider artist and an anomalistic news editor who was happy to be the Internet's Charlotte Fort

JUNA DAVITASHVILI

Juna (or Dzhuna) was born Evgenia Sardis in the southern Russian region of Krasnodar into a small ethnic group of Assyrian Christians. Her father was Iranian and her mother a Cossack. She took her Georgian-language surname (Davitashvili) from a former husband. After training as a nurse, she began using hand movements to heal patients. In 1980, KGB agents visited her home in Georgia to ask if she could cure the ailing Soviet President Brezhnev, 75, after the failure of conventional medicine. "I don't know, probably," she replied, and within a couple of hours she was on a plane to Moscow with her son Vakhtang. She refused to divulge what happened after that because of her 'Hippocratic oath', but said that as a result of her visit, "Leonid Ilyich [Brezhnev] told the minister of health the country should build me a whole clinic". Brezhnev did indeed look healthier, and he lived for another two years; Juna was summoned to his deathbed.

Juna allegedly foresaw the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster when a reactor blew up at the power plant, envisioning shortly before the incident: "Fire, fire, something is exploding, people are running." She also claimed to have foreseen the end of the Soviet era. While Western societies became increasingly sceptical about the phenomenon of healers and psychics, parapsychology was still accorded serious discussion in the Soviet Academy of Sciences up to the 1991 collapse of the USSR. Those with alleged wild talents would have millions of spellbound Soviet citizens glued to their television sets during broadcasts. Allan Chumak even once told viewers to put a glass in front of their TV sets, promising that it would be "charged with healing energy".

Juna only became a household name in the years following the breakup of the Soviet Union, and was awarded the Order of Friendship of Peoples by then-president Yeltsin in 1994. She allegedly treated Andrei Tarkovsky, Federico Fellini and Robert de Niro. In her numerous media appearances, she often called herself "the Assyrian princess". She cut a striking figure, according to the *New York Times* in 1988: "Dressed in her healing clothes – a short black skirt, black stockings, black blouse, yellow silk vest and a cascade of jewellery – she brings to mind Cher in *The Witches of Eastwick*." Some referred to her simply as "the new Rasputin", whose hands got hot as she healed patients, even remotely, according to newspaper reports from her heyday.

Juna claimed the power to cure cancer, knit broken bodies, and prolong life beyond 100 years. She maintained that a kind of energy, something like low-level electric current, emanates from her body and it was this bio-energy field that could cure most known diseases and prolong life. The leftist MP Oleg Finko called her "extraordinary", and admitted that he had used her services: "She was an honest person. If she couldn't help, she would not take the case." Rock musician Igor Matviyenko said he was married to Juna "for a month" in the late 1980s and "almost all the Politburo came to our wedding." He added that Kremlin limos were often seen outside her apartment, which became a place where "Kremlin leaders and artists rubbed shoulders".

In 1983 and 1984, American psi researcher Russell Targ visited the Soviet Union and was able to discuss remote viewing research with Russian scientists and visit supposed psychics including Juna – who allegedly described in detail a merry-go-round on pier 39 in San Francisco, where Targ's colleague Keith Harary was "hiding". She is said to have started her description six hours before Harary got there.

As well as being a mystic, painter and poet, Juna also tried her hand at Russian politics. In 1995, she ran in the parliamentary elections as the head of the Juna Davitashvili Bloc, but her 0.47 per cent of votes cast was not enough to give her a seat in the State Duma. Juna was not always serene. According to *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper, she once hit Russian pop diva Alla Pugachyova around the head with an ashtray while settling an alcohol-fuelled dispute. After her only son Vakhtang died in a car crash in 2001, Juna became a virtual recluse and rarely appeared in public. "Her energy had left her and she could no longer heal," said her friend, the Russian actor Stanislav Sadalsky. She died after slipping into a coma caused by circulation problems. Following her death, Russian television broadcast a documentary about her.

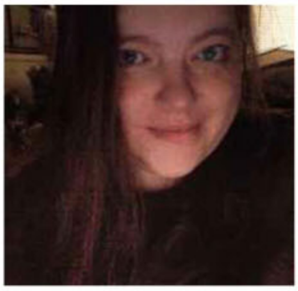
Evgenia Yuvashevna Sardis, afterwards Davitashvili, aka Dzhuna or Juna, astrologer and faith healer, born Krasnodar, USSR 22 July 1949; died Moscow 8 June 2015, aged 65.

MELANIE BILLINGS

Melanie Billings of Piedmont, South Carolina, was the weekday news editor for *The Anomalist* website from March 2012 until her death from flu complications last February. For four years she graced the fortean community with her distinctive take on ghost photographs, the Missing 411 phenomenon, Bigfoot habituators, timeslips, and other glitches in the matrix. In her acceptance of the news editor role at *The Anomalist* in 2012, she wrote: "I can't be the next Charles Fort, but Charlotte Fort suits me fine."

It did indeed. In an interview with the *New York Times* in 2003 regarding ghost hunting, she said: "Probably nine out of 10 strange occurrences can be explained by some earthly, mundane reason, like houses settling, the wind, old plumbing, maybe an animal, maybe just the absentminded misplacement of things," she said. "It's the rest of it that makes me do what I do. It's that one out of 10 that makes you go, 'hmmm.'"

Mel, as her friends knew her, founded two websites before joining *The Anomalist*. *All About Ghosts* (allaboutghosts.com) focused on hauntings, with coverage of urban legends, monsters, and UFOs, in addition to providing tips for ghost hunters. Her other site, *Hauntster* (hauntster.net), with the tagline



"Anomalies with Attitude", featured interviews with authors like Diana Gabaldon of the *Outlander* series and fantasy author Doug Clegg, as well as paranormal investigations with her collaborator, author Tamara Thorne.

Mel's ghost research was selected for inclusion in Jeff Belanger's *Encyclopedia of Haunted Places*, published in 2005. Among her contributions were entries on the 18th century ghosts haunting South Carolina's Blackstock Battlefield, Colorado's notorious ghost town of St. Elmo, and a private residence suspected of being a Grand Central Station for those transitioning to the afterlife.

"The fortean community has lost a strong, distinctive voice," wrote *Anomalist* Editor Patrick Huyghe in a note to readers on the website. "She was witty, knowledgeable, and razor sharp. Just as she had no patience for weak evidence and poor reporting, she was quick to call BS on dismissive explanations for apparently genuine phenomena."

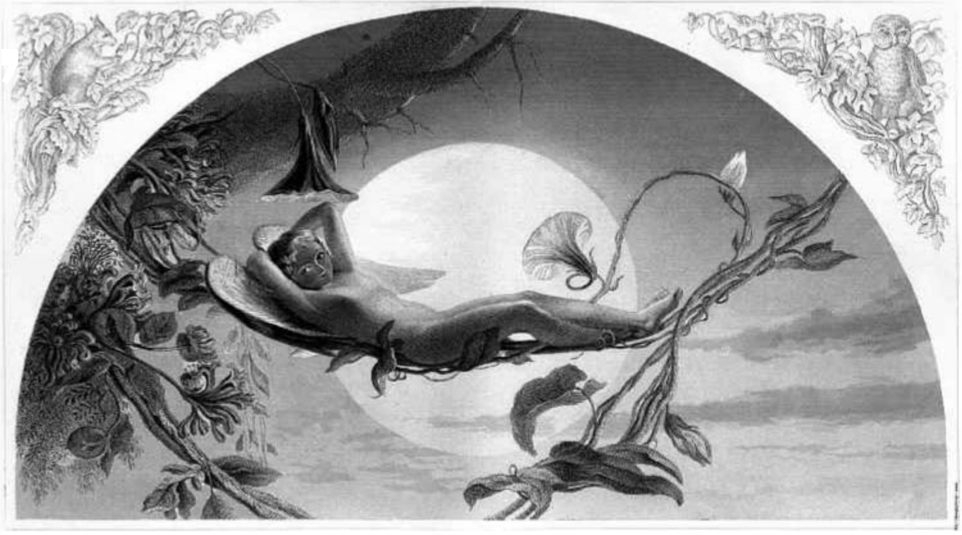
We will miss our daily journeys down the rabbit hole with Mel.

Melanie Billings, fortean editor, born Spartanberg, South Carolina 3 April 1973; died Greenville, South Carolina 21 Feb 2016, aged 42.
Chris Savia

THORNTON DIAL

This illiterate African-American metalworker from Alabama became the toast of the American art world in the 1990s. Brought up in the Great Depression in a poor farming community, Dial took the bric-a-brac of his neighbourhood – clothes, shards of metal, dolls, fishing tackle, buckets, branches, old boots and even animal bones – to create assemblages, laid on canvas or board with a thick impasto of colourful oils or crunched into distorted sculptures. While his materials were prosaic, his subjects, approached abstractly, were serious: racism, the horrors of 9-11 and homelessness. His career was greatly supported by the art historian William Arnett and the actress Jane Fonda, an avid collector.

Thornton Dial, outsider artist, born Emelle, Alabama 10 Sept 1928; died McCalla, Alabama 25 Jan 2016, aged 87.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

COUNTRY MONSTERS

In a file on my desktop I have a growing list of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh country monsters: the minor deities of British and Irish mythology.

Many of these beasts are the stuff of nightmares: a pixie sawing a woman's head off; fairies with whips to take out your eyes; or night-walking maids without faces who keep their heads in a basket by their side.

However, through the years of collecting, I've also been struck by the sheer – say it quietly – 'silliness' of some of these monsters.

> IN SOME CASES, IT'S AS IF MONTY PYTHON HAD PRODUCED AN EPISODE OF *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*

Even the scary ones have lapses in taste. For example, the faceless maid noted above would, if provoked, throw her head after people on the road and the head would then chew at the offender's backside.

In other cases it is as if Monty Python had produced an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. One writer of a list of Westmorland bogies from 1867 included, apparently with a straight face, the Invisible Human Hand in Pig Willy Wood; and the Versi-Coloured Rabbit of Scit Scot Brow. On that last point there are, perhaps surprisingly, lots of rabbits in the canons of British horror – including one as big as a sheep.

Sometimes supernatural entities are faux-baroque rather than faux-gothic. We have a 19th-century report from Coal-Aston in Derbyshire of a ghostly tableau that would appear on the village green: "Three tall, thin women, standing in a line, with three hour-glasses in their hands; secondly, a tall man, three yards high, with an oak tree over his shoulder; thirdly, a man with a scythe over his shoulder…" It's Woody Allen doing Bergman.

Then there is the ghost from the Midlands who appeared in "the shape of a black bird with a white tail or wing. Sometimes [the bird] was felt, but not seen, as in the case of a man… who, returning home late one evening on the back of his ass, was lifted from his seat in the deepest part of the lane, and fixed upright in the middle of the lane, the ass going on as if nothing had happened."

Folklore has its own sense of humour of course: some of these stories were doubtless told, in part, for laughs. But most seem to have been deadly serious.

We have perhaps been spoilt by the cinema: if something cannot be visualised as a celluloid sequence – and who would film a flying head biting the seat out of the hero's pants save in comedy? – then it can no longer scare us.

Those who created and experienced these traditions were perhaps not as good at visualising but had a greater imaginative capacity and so a greater capacity for terror…

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

the UFO files

FORTEAN TIMES presents our monthly section featuring regular sighting reports, reviews of classic cases, entries on major ufological topics and hands-on advice for UFO investigators. **The UFO Files** will benefit from your input, so don't hesitate to submit your suggestions and questions.

To contact **The UFO Files**, email: **nufon@btinternet.com**

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES CONCLUDES HER RE-EXAMINATION OF BRITAIN'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL UFO CASE

RENDLESHAM FOREST GENESIS: PART FIVE

During my research for this article, one important find was the first account given to researchers Brenda Butler and Dot Street by Jim Penniston in October 1983, when we were working on our book and at a time when the airmen's witness statements remained unreleased. Penniston spoke to us anonymously at the time, wary of co-operating further because of his security position at the airbase. At that time, we had no way of differentiating his 'eyewitness account' from others given to us by people on the base, most of which we can now see were exaggerated or nonsensical. He was just another USAF guy telling us what he insisted was the truth – and only 10 years later did we realise who he was and that he was one of the very few who had tried to do just that.

He said that at around 2am, guards at the east gate "saw lights shining over the tops of the trees" that "descended out of sight into the forest". They were told to await a security patrol, and then that he and Burroughs must leave their guns behind and "drive out in a jeep". Note – there is here no mention of Ed Cabansag, who was also present. They left the jeep, as the frozen ground was rutted, and after walking "a few hundred yards [we] became aware of red and blue lights ahead". At this point, "the radio we had been using to keep in contact with base suddenly went dead". They continued and got closer to the object. At this point the witness paused and appeared shaken, recalling what he had seen.

As they closed in, the object appeared to be "a triangular thing and it stood on three legs… about 10ft by 12ft [3 by 3.6m] and around 8ft [2.4m] in height". Asked if anything was inside, he said (like all the witnesses I ever spoke with) "I didn't see any aliens, if that is what you mean". Then, after a pause: "But there was definitely something there, inside. I don't know what. Shapes". This could be the origin of Penniston's recent claims of seeing something etched into the surface.

Interestingly, he added that one witness "went right up to it and looked as if he were planning to touch it. But the machine reacted and drew in its legs, retracting them up into the main body. Then it began to move around the forest just above ground level. It moved slowly. We could follow it walking and keep up. It displayed amazing manœuvrability dodging in and out of the trees."

He added that it made no sound at all, making the sight even more eerie. And "where the legs touched the ground we saw that it left holes". On closest approach they were so near "we got a very good look at it", and it was "an off-white and sort of dirty looking… On top there was a blue light with red lights and a white light in the middle and a brighter white light coming out of the bottom."

The airmen left the forest and followed it into a clearing beside a gamekeeper's house, where "it made some cows run around in panic before it let out a sudden intense burst of white light and rose to a height of about 200ft [60m] before shooting away from view at tremendous speed."

He added that during the second sighting photographs were taken – if so, these have never been released. He also referred to the then-rumoured but unreleased tape recording of the second night's events, but warned that an "edited version" existed that created "an impression", but would not say more. Though all three of us saw him once more a few weeks later, he decided to stay out of the limelight for some years until he was free to talk more openly.

Back then, this was one more story among many and we had no way to judge its veracity. But today it stands out as very consistent with known eyewitness testimony and gives the lie to the theory that this has been confabulated. Most of the key features of the Rendelsham Forest narrative are here from the very start.

Did these airmen mistake two lighthouses and other lights such as a falling meteor, simply imagining the rest? It's possible. However, now we know that the lighthouse option was recognised from the very start, so if anyone on base believed this was the answer why was the story not just buried and never reported to the MoD? For me, the fact this did not happen implies that a) these men were believed by the top brass, b) the lighthouse theory was rejected due to the unreported weird elements, and c) all were complicit in keeping these quiet because nobody had a clue what really happened.

The MoD has, in the past few years, finally released its documentation, defining what it says it did/did not do about Rendlesham in the early days. A lot of it is made up of letters sent to and from people such as myself during the early 1980s. There is discussion, for example, of my theory (1982), reported to the Ministry by Squadron Leader Moreland,

ABOVE: Rendlesham Forest today.

that an exaggerated alien contact story might have been leaked to UFO buffs to obscure an accident involving nuclear material; to which the MoD gleefully noted that they didn't expect "ufologists" to bother pursuing such an idea.

Briefly, the time line the released files reveal for the MoD investigation is as follows:

15 Jan 1981: Moreland forwards Halt's memo to the MoD air staff UFO team for "action as considered necessary". It is copied on by them to Eastern Radar and the Defence Intelligence Unit 55.

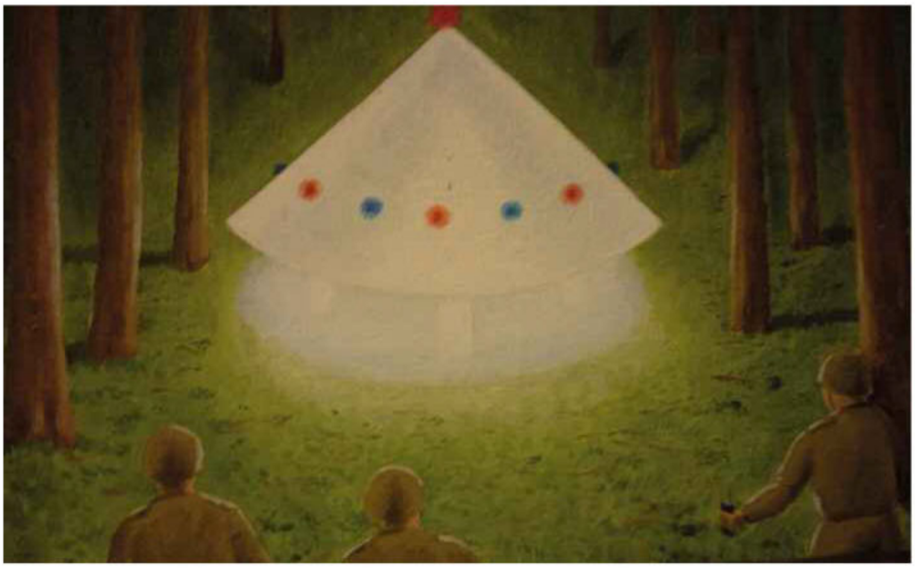
16 Feb 1981: Two weeks after the radar operator at his base has talked to us and we possess many other facts supposedly relayed by RAF/USAF staff accessing radar data, Squadron Leader Badcock at RAF Ops says he has "had no response" to his enquiries (!), but adds that the Neatishead radar was switched off on 29 December and that the logs refer to no "unusual radar returns or other unusual occurrences". Of course, they are checking the wrong dates, thanks to Halt's memo. Badcock adds that he has spoken with Moreland and he rates Halt as "a sound source". Interestingly, Moreland tells him that "tape recorders of the evidence" (sic) were handed over to a top US general who "happened" to be visiting Bentwaters. Badcock sensibly suggests the MoD should "have [the] tape recordings as well".

23 Feb 1981: Defence Intelligence (DI 52) say they "do not know of any serious explanation for the phenomena described". They note that, whilst background radiation varies dependent on location, the values cited seem "significantly higher than the average background count" (between seven and eight times higher). Later, this was put in doubt by other studies, and there are mitigating local factors, but the point is that eight weeks after a forest was irradiated by a UFO, according to a deputy NATO base commander, it is still fully open to the public and nobody is considering potential safety issues.

26 Feb 1981: Squadron Leader Coumbe at RAF Watton tells the MoD they have "now developed the film" (of the radar) for the nights before, during, and after the (as we now know, wrong) dates in the Halt memo. But all these films were "faulty". They confirm that on 27-28 December, the on-duty controller was "requested to view the radar" but "nothing was observed". So: it was decided, instantly, that nothing was seen on radar, *despite the films all being "faulty"*. Years later, an (undated, but seemingly 1984-5) letter to the air staff from Wing Commander Keith refers back to the radar debacle and says because the "tasking letter" from the MoD in 1981 had "referred to an incident on 29 Dec 1980" that the replies from RAF Neatishead and Eastern Radar (Watton) "are probably worthless" since "recordings are not held for four years, consequently we are back where we started".

2 Mar 1981: Defence Intelligence DI 55 finally confirms it "cannot offer any explanation". With regard to the radiation, DI 55 ask to be advised if DI 52 investigates further.

This is the extent of the 1981 study – although there are then letters from Pam Titchmarsh to RAF Ops discussing how she should reply to me in 1983. They show how her letter of 13 April, one that changed the case, came to be worded. For instance, she refers to the Halt tape and asks if they ever got a copy, as "our files do not appear to show the outcome of your investigation". She calls me "one of our more regular" correspondents and says she is inclined to tell me that they "made investigations but could find no explanation for the lights". This emphasis on 'unexplained lights' was the basis of every future MoD release and was used in Parliament; but Titchmarsh introduces her memo to RAF Ops by calling the UFO "a brightly lit triangular object either hovering or on legs". Had that been the emphasis in public MoD statements, the media might have taken things more seriously.



ROY SANDBACH

ABOVE: An artist's impression showing Penniston, Burroughs and Cabansag having a close encounter with the object they had pursued from the base's east gate through the forest.

Mrs Titchmarsh asks if such a reply to me would be "a true reflection of the facts" or if they had "come up with anything more substantive" that had never reached the MoD UFO department. Squadron Leader Badcock replied on 21 Mar 1983 that they never bothered chasing the Halt tape because this would "reveal no better report than that already received" – which, as we know, was mistaken, because the tape reveals solid data, such as the taking of photographs, among much else.

Badcock notes they have found no evidence of radar traces, but then expresses interest in the radar evidence I'd mentioned we possessed in my letter to Mrs Titchmarsh. He suggests he would "like to have a look", provided that "it can be managed without undermining our position".

Instead, she wrote as she did, and then contacted Wing Commander John Davies at RAF Mildenhall on 13 May, after getting my reply asking for a copy of the Halt memo – which was then only days away from being given by the MoD to the USAF for them to release under Freedom of Information.

To her credit, the Air Staff officer asked if she could send me the Halt report and if Davies would "seek the views of the USAF to disclosure" – very ironic given what was happening stateside. She also wanted him to ask if the USAF would let her tell me that: "they did investigate the incident".

Davies called the MoD four days later, and followed with a memo on 18 May to say it would take "some little time" for them "to get a decision on the release" and that it might even need to be authorised by the Secretary of State for Defence if "any security or intelligence implications are read into the reported sighting".

Events very rapidly overtook this process, as the Halt memo was released in the USA (via the MoD) days later. By June, we had a copy and took it to show Ms Titchmarsh, less than three months after her communications above. No wonder she knew the case so well that day and was willing to come down and talk to us – though, of course, she told us none of the above in August 1983.

Brenda Butler and Dot Street locally, and myself and others such as Kevin McClure and Bob Easton, obtained crucial facts about this case very early that the MoD *could* have uncovered and yet claim never to have done. Unless those records are 'elsewhere', this has to be worrying given the nature of the alleged intrusion into British air space in the middle of the Cold War and near to a UK nuclear reactor. At the very least, these claims surely had to be investigated speedily and public safety put first. But to delay for weeks and not even request key data such as photographs and tapes is mystifying. If, of course, this is what *really* happened, as opposed to what we are being told happened.

I've studied many UK cases over the years, going beyond the superficial MoD data that only reveals just how much their own reports left uninvestigated and undiscovered. Indeed, the MoD has now abandoned collating UFO data altogether. Rendlesham alone challenges the wisdom of that decision; even if, in this case, their judgement ultimately proves right, how can we know that the same would hold true next time?

Can a country facing modern threats that could come from anywhere afford to presume that sightings made by military personnel reporting UFO-like phenomena, weird effects and physical evidence require little investigation because they are written off by the MoD as "a few lights"? If so, then that is a most dangerous gamble.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

62 FIRESTARTER

THEO PAIJMANS searches out the fiery real-life antecedents of Stephen King's Charlie McGee

With the publication in 1980 of the novel *Firestarter* by prolific American horror author Stephen King, the world became acquainted with a girl called Charlie McGee, who could summon up terrible firestorms at will and one day might even be able to "change the Sun". In King's novel, Charlie's extraordinary ability was the result of a secret experimental programme by an even more secret US organisation called 'The Shop', in which it is easy to see a parody of the CIA.

King was writing fiction, with his fine mind attuned to nothing other than his inner, creative process. Yet there is a tradition older than King's novel about people who can summon up fire and flame through mysterious and inexplicable means. At least, that is what newspapers have proclaimed from time to time over the last two centuries.

In May 1987, seven years after the publication of King's novel, several newspapers in the West mentioned the curious case of the boy Sasha K, lifting the details from the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*. The youngster had been startling relatives and neighbours in his hometown of Yenakievo in the Ukraine for some time: "Fires break out in his presence, objects fly about; light bulbs explode. On one occasion, a refrigerator turned upside down. Neighbours panicked. The boy's father had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalised. The police were called". Another paper reported that the boy had been taken to Moscow for further examination, during which nothing out of the ordinary was found. It claimed that scientists were taking the story seriously. One witness said a shoe flew off his foot and out a window when the boy walked into the room. In the end, a Dr Adriankin stated that he believed that a poltergeist was involved. He also put forward the theory that the boy "projected some kind of mysterious energy" that could hypnotise people, "leaving them momentarily dazed and unable to remember exactly what had happened in his presence." *Izvestia* also offered another explanation by Dr Adriankin: "The boy was able to project a kind of electrical energy that ignited gases in the air, causing fires." Adriankin even speculated that, "because of the increasing air pollution and the resultant increase in the amount of gases in the atmosphere, more such cases could come to light." [1]

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

According to the superstitious locals of the settlement of Turlock, California, Willie Brough could "set fire to objects by merely fixing his eyes upon them"

The firestarter phenomenon stretches back beyond the accounts of Sasha K. In 1886, Turlock, a small settlement in the San Joaquin Valley in California, harboured Willie Brough, a boy, who, according to the superstitious locals, could "set fire to objects by merely fixing his eyes upon them". It was a remarkable feat that inspired a few editors to adopt the evocative headline "Flames Flashed from His Eyes". [2]

A newspaper reporter tried to make sense of the strange phenomenon by explaining that the boy was "evidently overcharged with electricity to a remarkable extent. The snapping of his fingers causes sparks to fly. The postmaster of Turlock has him relate gleefully how he set fire to wallpaper by this means." The story broke in the little community where Brough lived and the father was later forced to relocate the family. A reporter found them at their new location: "He denied that his son had caused fires, but admitted he… saw sparks flying about him. Willie is an extremely nervous boy, 11 years old, with a largely developed head. In a melancholy way he said he did not know how the mysterious fires occurred, but he said he saw sparks about his own body at night." MA Kuhlman knew, though. The teacher kept a school in Mercer county and he described how five fires broke out in one afternoon in different parts of the schoolhouse, "being caused by no visible agency". The school was evacuated, but Willie Brough was detained; the scarce accounts available to us now do not say why scrutiny fell upon him and why he was singled out in the first place. The story continues that "a few minutes later he fixed his eyes on a hay shed a few yards distant and called the teacher's attention to the fact that smoke issued from the same. Very soon it was in a blaze". The teacher stated that while he did not believe the boy to be guilty of arson, he was the victim of "supernatural agencies" and he barred poor Willie Brough from the school. If this was an attempt to stop the inexplicable goings-on, it was ineffective. Eleven mysterious blazes occurred in the house where Willie lived: "One broke out at the corner of the roof, another in some bedding on the middle of the floor, and the third charred some grain sacks in the barn. Willie looked at a straw stack nearby and flames issued out of the top." Since Turlock's inhabitants consisted in a large part of spiritualists, something more than a "natural explanation" was sought [3] for what one newspaper termed "the electrical boy". [4]

Perhaps the inhabitants of Turlock could have learned from certain events that had occurred in the small settlement of Paw Paw, Michigan, some four years earlier. A Dr LC Woodman wrote to a newspaper to share the incredible story of a 27-year-old man named William Underwood whose gift was "that of generating fire through the medium of his breath, assisted by manipulations with his hands. He will take anybody's handkerchief and hold it to his mouth, rub it vigorously with his hands while breathing on it, and immediately it bursts into flames and burns until consumed".

Underwood submitted, the newspaper said, to a series of stern examinations whereby he would "strip and rinse out his mouth thoroughly, wash his hands and submit to the most rigid examination to preclude the possibility of any humbug, and then by his breath blown upon any paper or cloth envelop it in flame." His strange powers did not stop there. The newspaper described how, when out on a hunt and wanting to make a fire, Underwood simply scraped a bunch of dry leaves together and set the pile alight by lying down and breathing on them. His phenomenal ability had its limits though: "It is impossible to persuade him to do it more than twice a day, and the effort is attendant with the most extreme exhaustion. He will sink into a chair after doing it, and on one occasion, after he had a newspaper on fire as narrated." A reporter who claimed to have been with the firestarter wrote how he placed his hand on Underwood's head, and discovered that the man's scalp twitched violently, "as if under intense excitement". [5]

Underwood, however, was not the first of the firestarters. Almost two decades before, in 1863, news filtered down from the village of Owasso, Michigan, concerning the strange circumstances a 10-year-old girl known only as Freeman, who had been adopted by a farmer named Stearns, found herself in. "While this little girl was sweeping the sitting-room… she discovered the carpet to be on fire, and the inmates having to put out the fire, undertook to learn its origin". A subsequent thorough examination could discover no cause for the flames that were found "issuing from some rags in another room". The same day, the girl's clothes caught fire, and the next morning a damp towel was found burning. The towel had been used by Mrs Stearns to wipe Freeman's face. This occurrence took place with some 12 persons present. Inexplicably, flames consumed a straw sack next to the house. On another occasion, a group of curious investigators discovered a bag of books and rags that had been stashed in the attic on fire, and on yet another occasion a trunk, said not to have been opened for a year, was discovered on fire. The family relocated to a new home some three miles distant, but the phenomenon simply followed them. "No sooner had the girl entered her new home than her dress caught fire in three different places". And the fiery contagion spread: "And now, one other family, where she has visited, are as badly tormented as is the family of Stearns," one newspaper reported. [6]

Scattered 19th century newspaper reports mention others who somehow had the ability to start a fire without any visible means of doing so. One 1896 newspaper mentioned the case of an Afro-American man from Michigan some 15 to 20 years earlier, who could 'fire' paper. Unfortunately, the report doesn't tell us who he was. The article was more forthcoming in the case of William Jackson of Fayetteville, Vermont. Jackson had learned of his unusual ability of setting a substance on fire by breathing on it by accident in 1887. A professor whom he consulted recalled a similar case from Italy in 1874. The professor also offered a theory of what caused Jackson's curious affliction. It came from the stomach, he thought, as Jackson must be "afflicted with a very peculiar form of dyspepsia". [7]

It may be that cases of firestarters are relatively rare, and in the end can be explained as sideshow tricks or circus acts. At least one owner of a variety theatre in San Francisco had a suit brought against him when he tried to exploit the novelty by exhibiting a counterfeit "Turlock Boy with the Fiery Eye". [8] Or perhaps such stories were simply born out of the whimsical imaginations of newspaper editors on slow news days.

On the other hand, there are many equally mysterious cases on record of unexplained fires breaking out in rooms, houses and other locales. Sometimes this phenomenon travels with a stricken family or person to a new home, just as poltergeists have been known to do, and which the Stearns family also experienced. Sometimes these outbreaks number into the tens or even hundreds in extremely limited periods of time. In 1893, fires erupted constantly in a house at Reuver in the Netherlands, sometimes as frequently as once every 15 minutes. A nursemaid lived there, and in line with contemporary thought about what might cause poltergeist phenomena, the spiritualist magazine that presented the case wondered if it was possible that the young woman was "a fire medium". [9] In 1941, 28 fires erupted in one day on a farm in Indiana, but the theory this time was that the farm might have been "in the centre of a strong magnetic field where static electricity prevailed". [10] Worse was to visit an Illinois farm in 1948. Over a period of 10 days, between 100 and 200 small fires erupted. [11] There seems to be a poltergeist element underlying some of the weirder instances. In the case of Sasha K, it is said that during an official investigation, "threatening inscriptions began to appear" on the walls of the flat where the boy lived. Before the apartment burned down, the family was "haunted by voices and visions" there. [12]

The case of Ona Smith of Alva, Oklahoma, perhaps best illustrates the bewildering and erratic nature of the firestarter phenomenon. In 1922, several American newspapers reported how mysterious blue fires constantly sprang out of nowhere and were threatening the life of the 23-year-old invalid woman. Lying paralysed on her bed in a small cottage, the unfortunate Smith had to be watched day and night. Her carers could only leap to the rescue as the fires broke out at intervals in her bedding and clothing. "Two mattresses have been burned, a calendar on the wall has been ignited, a shawl worn by the invalid has burst into flames and several other blazes started in the house," a newspaper recorded. [13] The eruptions had started just a few days before, without any apparent reason. Sadly, from what I have been able to gather, it seems that Ona Smith died not long after these strange events, taking any possible explanation with her into the great unknown.

NOTES

[1] See **FT49:8**. 'The Strange, Strange Tale Of Sasha K.', *Ottawa Citizen*, Ontario, Canada, 28 May 1987; 'Izvestia reports Poltergeist Pranks In The Ukraine', *Plain Dealer*, Cleveland, Ohio, 28 May 1987.

[2] 'Flames Flashed from His Eyes. How Willie Brough is Said to Have Set Fire to Haystacks', *Evening Star*, Washington, DC, 20 Oct 1886; *Atlanta Constitution*, Georgia, 21 Oct 1886; *Goldsboro Messenger*, North Carolina, 8 Nov 1886.

[3] 'A Peculiar electric Phenomenon. Willie Brough, the Boy Who Sets fire to Objects by Looking at Them', *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Missouri, 18 Oct 1886.

[4] 'An Electric Boy. Great Chance For Dime Museums', *Inter Ocean*, Chicago, Illinois, 19 Oct 1886.

[5] 'Underwood's fiery Breath. A Michigan Youth Who Ignites Articles by Blowing on Them', *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Missouri, 9 Dec 1882.

[6] 'Supernatural Fires', *Middlesex Chronicle*, London, 18 April 1863.

[7] 'Could Light Their Breath', *Evening Post*, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 14 Jan 1896.

[8] *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, California, 13 Nov 1886.

[9] 'The Mysterious Fires In Holland', *Light*, No.664, Vol. XIII, 14 October 1893, p485.

[10] *Reno Evening Gazette*, Nevada, 12 Dec 1941.

[11] 'Over 100 Phantom Fires Harass Ill. Farm Family', *The Cumberland News*, Maryland, 19 Aug 1948.

[12] 'Fire by… Own Wish?', *Izvestia*, 101, 11 April, 1987; 'Wonder' in Enakievo: What the Scientists Think About It', *Izvestia*, 147, 27 May 1987. Credit: Mikhail Gershtein.

[13] 'Mysterious Blue Fires Threaten Woman's Life. Fires Leap Out at Intervals From Clothing and Bedding of Invalid', *New-York Tribune*, 14 Mar 1922.

THE STAR WHACKERS

Whacked-out delusion or Tinseltown conspiracy? Someone is killing Hollywood's biggest star names, and only actor Randy Quaid knows the truth – or does he? **BRIAN J ROBB** explores the 'Star Whackers' conspiracy.

At the close of 2010, *Independence Day* 'star' Randy Quaid was on the run. With his wife Evi, Quaid was moving from hotel to hotel across Canada, trying desperately to stay one step ahead of 'them', the unknown, anonymous, threatening group out to get them. Quaid has his own name for them: the 'Star Whackers'. This aim of this bizarre group was simple: they wanted Quaid dead! "We're running for our lives," Evi Quaid told *Vanity Fair* magazine. "They're tracking us!"

Five years on, and the Quaids were in jail in Vermont, having been arrested in October 2015. The heavily bearded, 65-year-old Quaid (he could have played Santa Claus) and Evi had been facing deportation to the United States from Canada to face felony charges; they fled, but were apprehended at the border as 'fugitives'. Their subsequent release from jail, however, was unlikely to be the end of the saga: they are still wanted in California. How did it come to this for the Oscar-nominated actor?

HUNTED

According to the Quaids their deadly nemesis, the so-called 'Star Whackers', had already amassed a long list of Hollywood victims. Those who'd fallen foul of this strange cabal's activities supposedly included David Carradine and Heath Ledger (both actors died in 'mysterious' circumstances), and they'd set up Robert Blake (the child actor-turned-star of *Baretta* who was tried for the murder of actress Ronnie Lee Blakely), and were now targeting such teen idols as Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan.

"WE'RE RUNNING FOR OUR LIVES. THEY'RE TRACKING US!" SAID EVI QUAID

Randy Quaid – brother of the more famous and more successful Dennis – was once actually nominated for an Oscar for his role in the Jack Nicholson film *The Last Detail* (1973) and won a Golden Globe for playing Lyndon B Johnson in *LBJ: The Early Years* (1987). He was one of those Hollywood faces who appeared in a variety of roles in over 70 movies, most prominently in US vs aliens blockbuster *Independence Day* (1996) and as Cousin Eddie in the Chevy Chase *Vacation* movies, but also in 'arthouse' films like *Brokeback Mountain* (2005, with Heath Ledger). For most of his life he's been a C-list Hollywood celebrity, neither unusual nor particularly notable.

The weirdness that has enveloped the Quaids for the past half-decade began in 2009 (also the last year Randy appeared in a legitimate movie, the direct-to-video 'comedy' *Balls Out: Gary the Tennis Coach*) when a Santa Barbara hotel sued the couple for failure to pay a $10,000 bill. A year later they were squatting in a house in Montecito, California, that they'd once owned. Everything was eventually resolved (including the disputed hotel bill), with Evi – now aged 53 – hit with probation and community service for the illegal occupation of the house.

RANDY QUAID
RANDY QUAID
HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME
Randy Quaid

VINCE BUCCI / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Randy Quaid gets his star on the Hollywood Wall of Fame, 2003. **FACING PAGE:** Press conference outside the Hollywood house where Simon Monjack and his wife Brittany Murphy died six months apart.

DAVID MCNEW / GETTY IMAGES

HOLLYWOOD CONSPIRACIES: FACT OR FICTION?

NICOLAS CAGE: IMMORTAL TIME TRAVELLER

Nicolas Cage is one of Hollywood's more idiosyncratic actors, winning Oscars and opprobrium in equal measure. Recently, a photograph from 1870 surfaced on the Internet (where else?) that apparently depicted a gentleman with an uncanny resemblance to Cage. The actor had previously been tagged as a 'real life' vampire after he ate a live cockroach and, according to rumour, drank blood in preparation to play a role in *Vampire's Kiss* (1988). Cage himself debunked this 'immortal' nonsense on the Letterman show, but there are still some who believe he re-invents himself every 70 years or so to disguise his immortality…

WEIRD WIZARD: MUNCHKIN MURDER

A long standing cinematic legend has it that just as Dorothy and her new pals, the Scarecrow and the Tin Man (the Cowardly Lion has yet to join the gang) set off down the fabled yellow brick road in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, one of the marvellous Munchkins can be seen hanging from a tree in the dead centre of the screen. Was this one of the Munchkin actors taking his own life after being rejected in love? The Munchkins certainly had a reputation for bad behaviour on set, but that's going a bit far. See also, the story that Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* syncs up perfectly with *The Wizard of Oz*, so revealing hidden messages…

JAMES DEAN: TAKEN OUT BY THE CIA

If the CIA could 'rub out' President John F Kennedy and get away with it, surely taking out rebellious youth figurehead James Dean was a no-brainer? The 1955 car crash death of the then 24-year-old cultural icon scarred a generation. Dean had only completed three films – *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *East of Eden* (1955) and *Giant* (1956, released posthumously) – but his star was dramatically on the rise. The fact that Dean's coffin remained sealed, due to the nature of his mutilated corpse, fuelled rumours that he hadn't died in the manner related in the official story, or that the car crash was a deliberate set-up to silence the rebellious voice of the coming generation.

VERMONT POLICE

Earlier, Quaid had run into trouble during his appearance in the stage show *Lone Star Love*, a retelling of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which he'd quit before it moved from rehearsals in Seattle to off-Broadway performances in New York. One bone of contention was Quaid's insistence upon wearing a costume designed by Evi in his role as a cod-Falstaff. 'Creative disagreements' and Evi's involvement in the production soured relationships between cast members, culminating in Quaid allegedly striking a fellow actor when trying to knock his hat off. He was fined $81,500 in damages and banned for life from Equity, the actors' union, for verbally and physically abusing his co-stars.

Some outsiders read the situation as Quaid falling foul of the manipulative Evi, described by *Vanity Fair* as "a former Hollywood 'it' girl who once modelled nude for Helmut Newton". Quaid had divorced first wife Ella Marie Jolly in August 1989, but had met Evi in 1988 on the set of the Madonna movie *Bloodhounds of Broadway* (1989). They were married in October 1989 – at the same ranch hotel they would run out on 20 years later over that unpaid $10,000 bill.

Now in 2010 they were re-enacting Bonnie and Clyde's flight from the law, only in Canada rather than the Midwest. "They're hunting us," claimed Evi, explaining that she and Randy now feared for their lives. "They've got us in a spiral – 'don't let up on 'em, drive 'em off the road, starve 'em to death, pull their money out of their bank accounts…'"

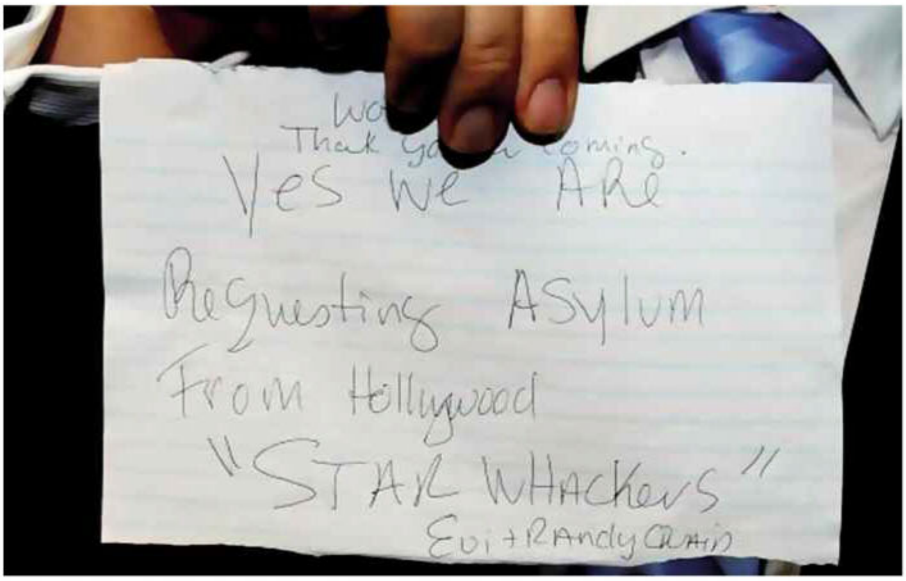
The reason for all this supposed harassment? It was very simple, according to Randy Quaid: "I guess I'm worth more to 'em dead than alive."

PATTERN OF BEHAVIOUR

When they arrived in Canada at the end of 2009, the Quaids claimed they were 'refugees' seeking 'asylum'. One thing that drove the pair to hit the road was the mysterious drying up of Quaid's residuals and royalty cheques – ignoring the fact that he hadn't done much work in recent years, and so hadn't been earning the same as before. In the Quaids' world of conspiracy, this could only mean his cheques were being stolen by 'them' – the Star Whackers.

Then Randy Quaid's buddy David Carradine died.

Carradine – one member of a Hollywood dynasty founded by 1940s horror and B-movie actor John Carradine – passed away in 2009 at the age of 72. Nothing too odd there… except for the fact that he was found hanging naked in a closet in a hotel in Bangkok, Thailand. The first conclusion was suicide, quickly followed by allegations of autoerotic asphyxiation gone wrong. One of his former wives, Gail Anderson, told the press: "There was a dark side to David, there was a very



Wo
Thak yo coming.
Yes We ARE
Requesting Asylum
From Hollywood
"STAR WHAckers"
Evi + RAndy QuAid

TOP: Randy and Evi, arrested in 2010 after crossing the border from Canada into Vermont. **ABOVE:** The Quaids' curious note "requesting asylum from Hollywood Star Whackers".

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Randy Quaid (left) and David Carradine (right) in happier days with Carradine's brother Keith. **BELOW:** A medical examiner outside the autopsy room where Carradine's body was being analysed following his death.

intense side to David. People around him know that." Anderson had cited "deviant sexual behaviour" that was "potentially deadly" in her divorce petition. The official autopsy settled on "accidental asphyxiation" as the cause of death.

Randy Quaid, though, didn't see it that way – not at all.

According to Evi, the Star Whackers had decided to kill the *Kung-Fu* star in order to collect the insurance covering the movie he was then making. A year after Carradine's death, his widow Annie appeared to agree with them, filing a wrongful death lawsuit against MK2 Productions, the company behind *Stretch* (2011), the film Carradine was working on when he died. A settlement saw the company pay compensation, reported to be $400,000, contradicting the Quaids' claim the actor was killed for his insurance; the only one to legitimately benefit was his widow. Additionally, another of Carradine's ex-wives (he married five times) later published a book claiming that the actor had indeed been murdered.

At the time Carradine died, the Quaids claimed they were being 'persecuted' by Santa Barbara police over the unpaid hotel bill. For their part, the police department claimed the Quaids had left a series of unpaid hotel bills (for sums of $500, $17,000, and $55,000), displaying what they called a "pattern of behaviour". Apparently, after giving up the home they owned, the Quaids rented houses that formerly belonged to Steve Martin and Lauren Bacall, before taking up long-term rentals in high class hotels and failing to pay the resulting bills (although Evi claims all bills had been paid). The pair then went on the run to Canada.

REEL LIFE

The list of conspiracies against the Quaids is a long one – if you believe the Quaids, that is. The allegations they have raised include that, as well as all those hotels, the Santa Barbara police department, the producers of the stage show, former neighbours, the producers of television show *Entourage*, and a cabal of lawyers, accountants, real estate agents and Hollywood powerbrokers were all conspiring against them.

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

It'd make a great movie – maybe one starring Randy Quaid.

The roots of the 'conspiracy' stretch back to the Quaids' purchase of their Montecito, California, home in 1989 for $1.35 million (the one they later squatted). The deluded duo claim their house was effectively 'stolen' by a shadowy cabal using forged signatures, which Evi claims "an FBI handwriting analysis" proves. According to her, the new official legal owner of the house was nothing more than a front for the creepy cabal. The same cabal was blamed for 'stealing' their car – in fact, it was taken by a repossession company.

Then there is the case of the missing money. Hollywood stars are paid 'residuals', royalty payments on top of their 'for the job' salary that varies depending upon such things as theatrical rentals (cinema screenings), DVD sales and other income. The Quaids claim, according to Evi, that "Randy's royalty stream is [being] stolen", that much of Randy's anticipated residual income has been syphoned off by the same cabal that stole their house. Much of this was outlined in a 220-page lawsuit the couple filed in 2010,

TRICKSTER TRIUMPHS: ANDY KAUFMAN LIVES

Arch prankster Andy Kaufman, star of *Taxi* and the man behind 'lounge singer' Tony Clifton, died unexpectedly in 1984, aged just 35, from a rare form of lung cancer. Kaufman had reportedly talked of faking his own death and re-appearing 20 years later, so those who were distraught at his passing clung to this hope. Despite his non-reappearance in 2004, as scheduled, sightings of 'Tony Clifton' and Kaufman continue to be reported, alongside rumours that he died from AIDS years after 1984. Jim Carrey starred as Kaufman in the 1999 biopic *Man in the Moon*, which left the question of Kaufman's death open. In the 2014 book *Andy Kaufman: The Truth, Finally*, Kaufman's friend Bob Zamuda claimed the actor's upper limit on remaining in hiding was in fact around 30 years, so expect his re-emergence any day now... (see **FT275:32-35** for more).

WALT DISNEY: FROZEN

Was Mickey Mouse creator and Disneyland entrepreneur Walt Disney (or at least his head) cryogenically frozen following his death so he could be resurrected when medical technology advanced enough? The story has circulated since he died in 1966. Although the first known cryonic human freezing didn't happen until 1967, a French magazine claimed in 1969 that Disney had undergone the procedure. His daughter denied it in 1972, but the rumour refuses to defrost.

AVRIL LAVIGNE: DOPPELGÄNGER

Was 1990s pop star Avril Lavigne killed and replaced by an identical duplicate? And if so, how could we tell? With her 2013 single 'Hello Kitty', Lavigne changed her style and look so dramatically that some fans claimed the 'new' Avril was not the same as the 'old' Avril. The story goes that the 'real' Avril Lavigne was killed shortly after the release of her debut album *Let's Go* and replaced by an Illuminati-controlled lookalike. A Brazilian website goes to great lengths to explain the theory, but it has yet to catch on in the wider conspirasphere.

STANLEY KUBRICK: CONSPIRATOR IN CHIEF

What Hollywood conspiracy didn't involve reclusive director Stanley Kubrick? From the hidden messages in *The Shining* (see the brilliant documentary *Room 237*) to his faking of the Moon landings, Kubrick has been accused of it all (see **FT332:32-36** for the full story).

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: High profile Hollywood victims of the supposed conspiracy include (left-right): Heath Ledger, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Paul Walker, Simon Monjack and Brittany Murphy.

but which was never pursued when their $905 cheque to pay the filing fee bounced. The document names 17 individuals as being part of the Star Whackers conspiracy against the Quaids and others.

Ever creative, the couple have turned their adventures into an as-yet unreleased movie called – what else? – *Star Whackers*. Directed by Evi and starring Randy, the 2011 film lays out their long fight against the shady 'them'. The film was promoted as taking place in a world where "there is a plague upon the Hollywood star system: movie stars are worth more dead than alive due to lucrative ad revenue on the Internet" and relates the story of those who plot the demise of a Hollywood actor and "hunt him so to appropriate for themselves his value as a movie star". Billed as a 'work in progress', the film was screened in Vancouver, where local critics called it "drugged-out dreck" and "naked nuttiness signifying nothing" – and those were the good reviews.

SHARED MADNESS

What's behind all this lunacy? Friends of Quaid's blame Evi and speculate that the couple are caught up in a 'folie à deux', a shared madness brought on by extreme stress. A recognised psychiatric syndrome, 'folie à deux' features delusional beliefs and hallucinations that are not only shared by two people, but can be passed from one to the other and therefore reinforced in a psychic feedback loop. A 'dominant personality', the strong-willed Evi, may be able to convince another, Randy, whose career was in freefall, that their present misfortune is not their fault but is in fact a plot directed at them. Instead of getting the help they perhaps need, the Quaids have played out their delusions in public, helped to some extent by the ever present Internet conspirasphere. A form of co-dependency, 'folie à deux' may be the best real-world explanation for what has happened to Randy and Evi Quaid.

However, if Randy Quaid is actually right, who else might the 'Star Whackers' have eliminated in recent years – and why? Of course, the danger is that any unexpected or difficult-to-explain Hollywood death could easily be filed as a case of a star being 'whacked'. Some recent Hollywood deaths are, however, stranger then others.

MICHAEL JACKSON
CHARLEY GALLAY / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Was Michael Jackson star whacked because he was worth more dead than alive?

Rising star Heath Ledger died in 2008, just before the release of his groundbreaking performance as the Joker in *The Dark Knight* (2008). *The Brothers Grimm* (2005) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) star died in New York during a break from shooting Terry Gilliam's *The Imaginarium of Dr Parnassus* (2009) from a cardiac arrest brought on by prescription drug intoxication (many of them benziodiazepines, which would also be attributed as contributory causes to the death of Brittany Murphy and Michael Jackson the following year). Although Ledger's prescribing doctors – and actress Mary-Kate Olsen – were investigated for supplying drugs to him, no charges were brought.

Then there's the case of 32-year-old rising star Brittany Murphy, who died in 2009. The *Clueless* (1995) actress was on a roll in the early 21st century, working on films such as *8 Mile* (2002), *Sin City* (2005), and *Happy Feet* (2006). On 20 December 2009, Murphy collapsed in her bathroom: she was rushed to hospital, where she died after a 'cardiac arrest'. The cause of death was unknown until February 2010, when it was designated as pneumonia, combined with legal, over-the-counter prescription medications (as with Ledger). In May 2010, her 40-year-old widower, producer Simon Monjack, was found dead in the same house, with pneumonia also the cause of death. The weird coincidence of the two deaths coming close together and at the same property led to speculation that included death by 'toxic mould' and deliberate poisoning by 'heavy metals'.

The same year, 2009, saw the unexpected death of music superstar Michael Jackson. The 50-year-old Jackson's star was on the wane from the days of the Jackson Five and *Thriller*, and he'd been dogged by allegations of child abuse since the mid-1990s. He'd faced a trial in 2005, followed by his acquittal. Jackson's weird lifestyle, including his marriage (to his nurse), his children (oddly named Prince, Paris, and Blanket), and his Neverland Ranch, all attracted media attention. In June 2009, Jackson died of acute propofol and benziodiazepine intoxication, and his doctor, Conrad Murray, was convicted of involuntary manslaughter. Jackson was just one of several artists who were more valuable dead than alive due to the worth of their back catalogues – one of the things that Quaid claims makes Hollywood stars targets of the Star Whackers. Jackson has been the 'top earning dead celebrity' six years running,

MYSTERY DEATHS IN LA-LA LAND

Strange deaths are nothing new in Hollywood. One of Tinseltown's earliest unsolved murders is that of pioneering film director **William Desmond Taylor**. In 1922, he was found shot dead in his Hollywood home; suspects included starlet Mary Miles Minter, her mother Charlotte Shelby, actress Mabel Normand, or the director's valets, Edward Sands and Henry Peavey. The murder remains unsolved a century later and has provided the source material for countless books, both 'fact' and fiction.

Western filmmaker and silent movie star **Thomas Ince** died of a 'heart attack' in November 1924, four days after falling ill on board newspaper magnate (and model for *Citizen Kane*) William Randolph Hearst's yacht. Rumours soon circulated that Hearst had shot Ince dead, mistaking him for Charlie Chaplin, whom Hearst suspected of having an affair with his girlfriend, B-list actress Marion Davies. Hollywood insider Peter Bogdanovich made the disputed incident the centerpiece of his 2001 film *The Cat's Meow*.

ABOVE: George Reed supposedly shot himself – but was it really a homicide?

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

George Reeves – television's 1950s Superman – supposedly shot himself in 1959, aged 45. Ruled a suicide, the star's death brought the *Adventures of Superman* series to an end, but his mother refused to accept the official explanation. Was it a mob hit arranged by the studio, as Reeves was seeing Toni Mannix, wife of MGM head Eddie Mannix? Or did an argument with another jealous girlfriend lead to tragedy? New Batman Ben Affleck played Reeves in the 2006 movie *Hollywoodland*.

One of the biggest mystery deaths of all, of course, is that of **Marilyn Monroe**, who died in 1962 supposedly of a sleeping pill overdose as her career was going off the rails. Or did she? There are myriad theories and competing accounts of the glamorous Marilyn's final days, often featuring such notable personages as JFK, Frank Sinatra, and the Mafia.

Bob Crane, *Hogan's Heroes* star, was found bludgeoned to death in 1978. His death was a mystery, but was believed to have been a result of a homosexual assignation gone wrong. The case was re-opened in 1990, when Crane's friend John Henry Carpenter was tried for his murder, only to be acquitted in 1994. Crane's death was the subject of Paul Schrader's 2002 film *Auto Focus*.

James Dean's *Rebel Without a Cause* co-star **Natalie Wood** died in 1981, supposedly falling from a boat off Santa Catalina Island and drowning. The two men on the boat with her – Hollywood stars Robert Wagner, her husband, and Christopher Walken – have remained tight-lipped about what happened that night, allowing speculation to run riot. The case remains open and unsolved.

ABOVE: In the past 12 months, the Quaids have been releasing a series of increasingly bizarre YouTube videos, including this one where Randy simulates sex with Evi while she wears a picture of Rupert Murdoch over her face.

according to *Forbes* magazine, earning $115 million in 2015.

Those three high profile deaths came in quick succession in 2008 and 2009, just before Randy Quaid's 'troubles' kicked off, and all involved abuse of prescription drugs. Perhaps, looking at what was happening around him in Hollywood, and fuelled by Evi's emerging paranoia, Quaid began to believe he was next on the Star Whackers' hit list? Thereafter, it would be easy for Quaid to attribute each and every Hollywood death to the machinations of his invisible tormentors.

As always in human history, the deaths kept coming, many of them drug-related or strange suicides. Those attributed by Quaid and others to the nefarious Star Whackers include Amy Winehouse (2011, alcohol poisoning, and the latest member of the infamous '27 Club' of musicians who died at that age, including Kurt Cobain, Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin; see **FT280:57-59**); Whitney Houston (2012, drowning in a bath tub); *Fast and Furious* star Paul Walker (2013, car crash); comedian Robin Williams (2014, suicide, although also a potential victim of the 'Curse of Aaron Ramsey'; see **FT325:53-55, 339:2**); and acclaimed actor Philip Seymour Hoffman (2014, drug overdose). Intriguingly, Hoffman's death was 'predicted' by a celebrity news website that reported his demise from the same cause the day before it actually happened – an event denied by his agents. Were the Star Whackers getting ahead of themselves?

The Quaids may be living their lives in a delusional bubble, but there is enough to his allegations of a Star Whacker conspiracy to get people thinking, and others are starting to drink the Quaid Kool-Aid, too. Asked about the Star Whackers, Michael Jackson's one time promoter Leonard Rowe said: "Randy Quaid is 100 per cent correct."

Perhaps, as in the original *Independence Day*, Randy Quaid might turn out to be an unlikely hero who will save us all… FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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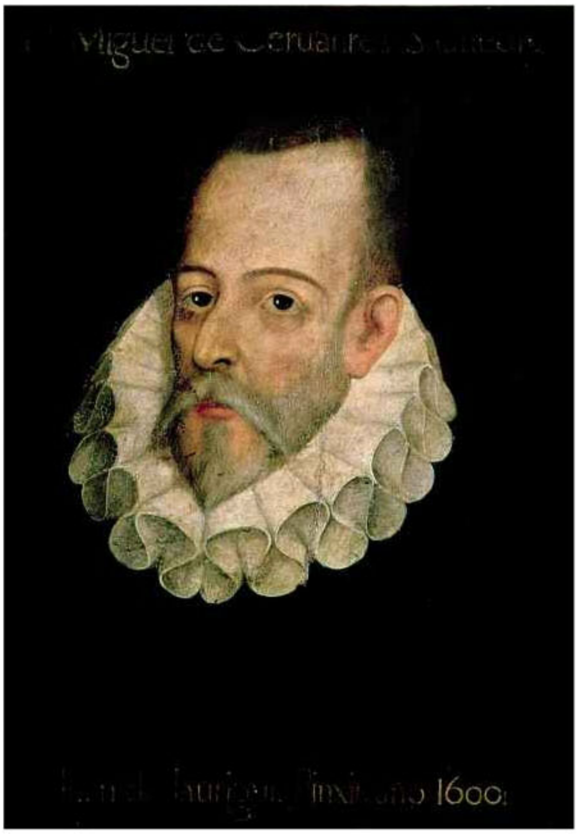
THE SECRETS OF DON QUIXOTE

Miguel de Cervantes died 400 years ago, leaving behind a work that continues to entertain readers today. But, do secret messages and hidden meanings lurk beneath its picaresque surface, waiting to be discovered by initiated readers? **MARIA J PÉREZ CUERVO** uncovers the man behind the masterpiece, and asks what he might have been trying to tell us...



LEFT: There are no authenticated portraits of Cervantes, although this is one of the earliest.

If we overlook calendar discordances, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and William Shakespeare died on the same date: 23 April 1616. Both men's lives and works have been studied extensively, yet both remain equally elusive. The unsolved questions in Cervantes's life point to possible hidden meanings in his works – particularly in his masterpiece *Don Quixote*, widely regarded as the first modern European novel.

What do we know about Cervantes's life? At the very least, it is worthy of being turned into a 17th century-set thriller: it's a whirlwind of misfortune and fortuitous incidents, which, almost miraculously, saved his life on more than one occasion. Most of it remains a mystery – and it sometimes looks as if the author wished it so. But did the lionhearted, unlucky adventurer, later to be known as Spain's "Prince of Letters", have something to hide?

When he was a young man, Cervantes enlisted as a soldier in the Spanish Navy. He survived the 1571 Battle of Lepanto against the Ottoman Empire, despite having gone to the front stricken with malaria and having suffered three gunshot wounds, one of which rendered his left arm useless. The episode earned him the nickname "the one-armed man of Lepanto", but he always remained proud of taking part in what he described as "the highest occasion that the past centuries saw and that the coming centuries will not expect to see".

He spent the following four years as a soldier. Having gathered a few letters of recommendation, he decided to go back to Spain – but his return journey in 1575 turned out to be doomed: Miguel and his brother Rodrigo were captured by Barbary corsairs somewhere between Naples and Spain, and taken to Algeria. The pirates demanded a high ransom for both, which put yet more pressure on the delicate financial situation of the Cervantes family, who had struggled with debt for some time. As they only managed to collect enough money to save one brother, Miguel renounced his freedom so that Rodrigo could return home. Miguel remained a prisoner in Algeria for five years, during which he tried to escape five times, always unsuccessfully. On two of these occasions he was betrayed by two different compatriots, one of them a Dominican friar; at least once, he declared himself to be responsible for the attempt, for which he was sent to the dungeons. It was the darkest time of his life, yet there seemed to be a relentless energy in him, a drive to survive and succeed at any price. He kept his intellect busy by observing what happened around him, studying how Algeria might be conquered, with the aim of offering valuable information to the secretary of the King and to his homeland. Finally, in 1580, his family, helped by two friars from the religious order of the Trinitarians, paid a ransom of 500 ducats for his release. When Cervantes returned to Spain he was 33. His father was elderly, deaf and ruined; Miguel was likely impatient to find a fair compensation for his years of captivity.

CERVANTES'S LIFE IS WORTHY OF BEING TURNED INTO A 17TH CENTURY-SET THRILLER

At the height of the Spanish kingdom – the original "empire on which the

Sun never sets" – the secret services of King Philip II were well known for their ruthlessness: diplomats and ambassadors were authorised to blackmail, bribe and kill, and they did so on a regular basis. Cervantes knew that his experience, particularly his Algerian episode, made him an ideal candidate to become a spy for Philip II, so he travelled to a plague-quarantined Lisbon, where the Spanish court had taken residence, searching for a mission. The king entrusted him with one, but he would have to pay a price for it: in 1581, only a few months after he'd escaped his captivity, the author travelled back to Algeria to learn about the intentions of the Turkish admiral Uluch-Ali. He stayed until he was able to gather the information sought by the king. On his journey back he was nearly killed by the corsairs several times – though, yet again, he managed to arrive safely in Cartagena. In spite of his success, the king never requested his services again. Cervantes had to content himself with a bag of ducats, but no promotion, nor the respectable position he hoped for.

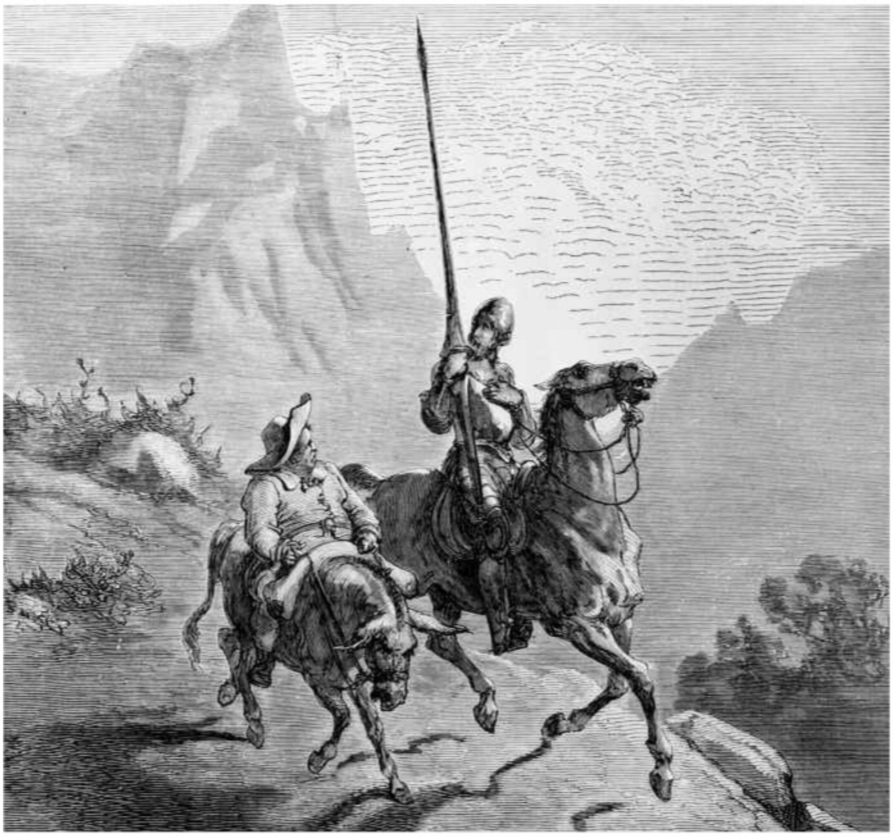
Twice in his life, in 1582 and 1590, he asked to be sent to the New World, but his applications were denied. He had to find other means to survive, so he worked as a purchasing agent for the Spanish Armada and as a tax collector for the government, and continued to write in his spare time. It wouldn't be until 1605, when the first part of *Don Quixote* was published, that he experienced some success, though not of the monetary kind. Misfortune hit him on several further occasions, and he went to prison at least four more times. The reasons varied: from tax irregularities to the unfortunate death of a man outside his house. More than once, it seems, the judge abused his authority.

Was there a reason behind his continued ill fortune? Why was he never promoted? Why was he betrayed by his compatriots? Why did a man who was clearly intelligent, driven and courageous have to struggle to make a living?

JEWISH ROOTS

A large number of literary historians have now come to accept the thesis that Cervantes likely came from a family of *conversos*. This word is used to describe Spanish Jews who, after the Alhambra decree issued in 1492 by the Catholic monarchs of Spain, were forced to convert to Christianity or leave their homeland. After the decree, Jews were officially prosecuted by the Inquisition, and those suspected of practising Judaism in secret were labelled as *marranos*, meaning "filthy", "pig", and "outcast". The atmosphere of communal paranoia explains the Iberian obsession with "blood purity": being a Christian was no longer good enough – a respectable position would only come from being able to prove one's Christian lineage, which would confer the desired status of "Old Christian".

RISCHGITZ / GETTY IMAGES



TOP: The house where Cervantes corrected the first proof of *Don Quixote*. **RIGHT:** Sancho and Quixote in an illustration by Gustav Doré.

There are several clues that support the thesis of Cervantes's Jewish origin: namely, a 15th century document by Fernán Díaz de Toledo that lists the Cervantes family as New Christians; and the fact that the professions of his ancestors were traditionally carried out by Jews: clothiers, barber-surgeons, *licenciados*. Of course, the profession of tax collector, which Miguel adopted after leaving his life as a soldier, was also a traditional Jewish occupation.

The analysis of the surname Cervantes also reveals a Jewish connection. At the time, it was common among *conversos* to adopt as their new surname the name of the place from which they came. There are at least two villages named Cervantes in the mountains of León, an area that Cervantes references in *Don Quixote*. Saavedra, his second surname, and Quijana, his mother's, are also found there, among families of Jewish origin. It's also worth noting that Don Quixote's full name was Alonso Quijano, which may give us a clue to the religious background of the character.

Cervantes's status of *converso* would certainly explain why he was never promoted, in spite of a respectable military career, and why he struggled to survive financially until his final days. But if that was the case, did he leave any clues about his secret in his works?

OCCULT MEANINGS

Many authors in the Golden Age of Spanish literature, such as Mateo Alemán, whose novel *Guzmán de Alfarache* is often cited as an inspiration for Cervantes, draw a distinction between the "masses" and the "discreet reader", as if only the latter could understand the true meaning of the text.

In the prologue to his *Novelas ejemplares*, Cervantes admits to having incorporated "some hidden mystery… that redeems [the stories]". The intention of the works would only be revealed after a careful reading: "If you look at them well, there's none from which you can't take out a beneficial effect". Professor Rosa María Stoops states that the plot of each of these stories illustrates a different aspect of the alchemical process, with references to sacred geometry.

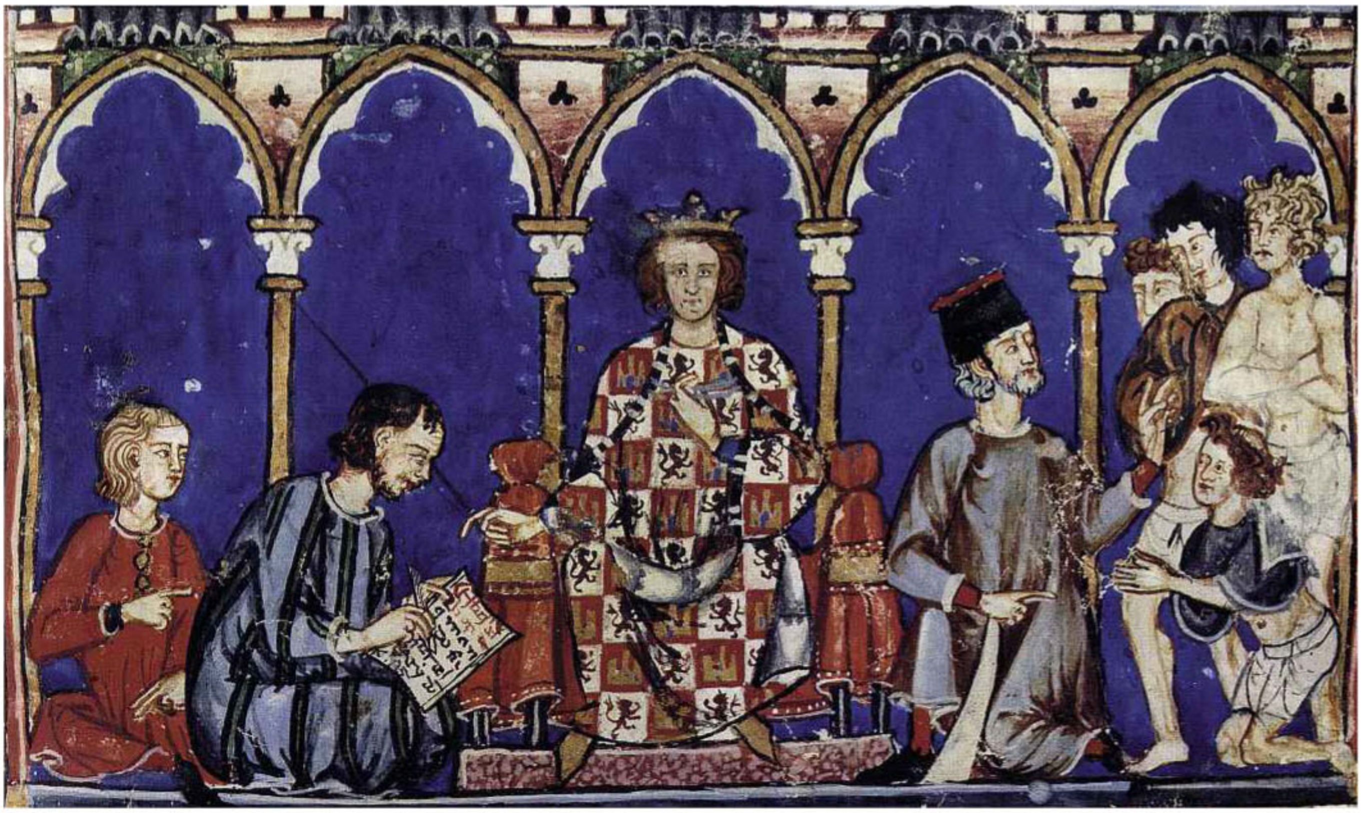
But it is of course *Don Quixote* that has been most analysed. Although it was first received as a satire of books of chivalry – a mere work of entertainment, which explains its immediate popularity – the first suggestions of a hidden, deeper meaning appeared at the end of the 18th century. In 1789, Vicente de los Ríos pointed to the double perspective between the protagonist and the reader, since the latter "merely sees a casual and ordinary event in what to Don Quixote is a rare and extraordinary thing". The double perspective extends to the two main characters, who tend to see quite different – indeed, opposite – realities throughout their adventures. Also in the 18th century, author José Cadalso suggested a hidden meaning under the façade of entertainment and comedy, although he didn't elaborate further.

HIS STATUS AS A CONVERSO WOULD EXPLAIN WHY HE WAS NEVER PROMOTED

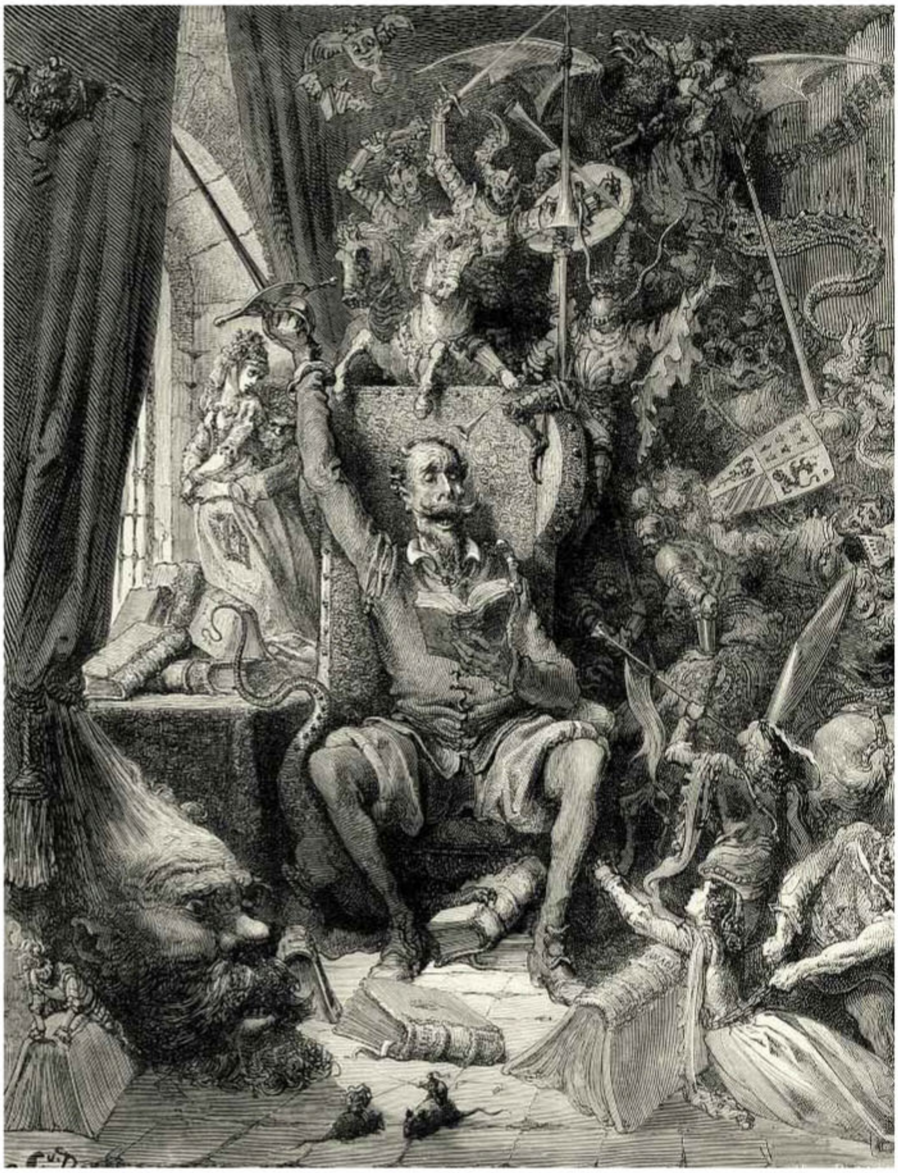
The theory of a hidden Jewish meaning in *Don Quixote*, explored by several historians and literary critics, hasn't always been well received in the most orthodox academic circles, but it's a legitimate and fascinating area of inquiry. The twice Nobel Prize-nominated Dominique Aubier already suggested in 1966 that the word *qeshot* means "truth" or "certainty" in Aramaic. She also added that Quixano, the character's original name, is an anagram for *anokhi*, the Hebrew first person pronoun, which would suggest Cervantes's identification with his immortal character.

Meanwhile, the name of Dulcinea del Toboso, Don Quixote's feminine ideal, would be derived from *tov sod*, Hebrew for "secret of the good". Aubier also argued that Dulcinea symbolises the *Shekhinah,* in Kabbalah the feminine aspect of the divinity that accompanied exiled Jews – the Talmud tractate Megillah states that "wheresoever they were exiled, the Shekhinah went with them". Where Sancho and the others merely see the peasant Aldonza Lorenzo, a "sturdy, manly lass" far from the chivalric ideal, Don Quixote sees Dulcinea, the embodiment of feminine perfection.

Aubier suggests that the intention of Cervantes was to reconcile the three great monotheistic religions, and for this reason, he combined elements of the three in his book: Don Quixote was a New Christian whose initiation, based on the Zohar, is narrated by a Muslim (Cervantes used the literary device of a "found manuscript" supposedly penned by Moorish historian Cide Hamete



ABOVE: The 13th century court of Alfonso "The Wise", where members of the three monotheistic religions coexisted peacefully.



ABOVE: "A world of disorderly notions, picked out of his books, crowded into his imagination". The madness of Don Quixote in an illustration by Gustav Doré.

Benengelí). Perhaps, as María Rosa Menocal suggested, Cervantes was lamenting the loss of the culture of tolerance epitomised by the kingdom of Alfonso X "The Wise" (1221-1284), who fostered a cosmopolitan Spanish court where members of the three religions coexisted peacefully and collaborated intellectually.

Even if we don't consider the book to be a Jewish allegory, there are several details that suggest that Don Quixote could have been conceived as a *converso*. The most obvious of all is the attitude of the two main characters: whereas Sancho emphatically claims to be an Old Christian on more than one occasion, Don Quixote avoids references to his religious background.

The infamous opening line of the novel ("In a village of La Mancha, the name of which I have no desire to call to mind") has also been interpreted as a reference to the Jewish background of the protagonist: La Mancha is a region of Spain, but it also translates as "the stain", which could be an oblique reference to the secret status of Don Quixote – and that of the author himself.

One of the first descriptions that Cervantes makes of the character is that he "eats *duelos y quebrantos* on Saturdays". The first English translation (1612, Thomas Shelton) uses "collops and eggs"; similarly, in French and Italian it's been translated as eggs and ham or eggs and bacon. A poem attributed to Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681) confirms the meaning, lost in modern Spanish. It is puzzling, however, that the name of the dish means literally "grief and infringements". Only a *converso* would regard the meal as a combination of both, since the Jewish faith prohibits eating pork, most of all on Saturdays, the sacred day of *shabat*.

THE AMBIGUITY OF MADNESS

There's an interesting episode that deserves to be analysed in depth: while Don Quixote sleeps, his niece, his housekeeper, the curate, and the barber burn his books of chivalry, considering them to be at the root of his madness. His niece specifically says that the books "deserve to be burned like heretics". As they go through them, they find a novel named "The Knight of the Cross", which prompts the curate to say: "For the sake of the holy name this book has… its ignorance might be excused; but then, they say, 'behind the cross there's the Devil; to the fire with it." The curate saves some other books "because the author is a friend of mine", and when the barber hands him "The Galatea" by Miguel de Cervantes, he also decides to save it, as he knows the author and the fact that he "has had more experience in reverses than in verses". Most of their decisions are entirely arbitrary, and when they finally burn the pile, Cervantes writes that "some must have been consumed that deserved preservation in everlasting archives, but their fate and the laziness of the examiner did not permit it, and so in them was verified the proverb that the innocent suffer for the guilty." The criticism of the Inquisition and the burning of heretics is clear. The author even slips in the suggestion that evil ("the Devil") might hide behind a cross, questioning the moral authority of Catholicism.

It is the ambiguity in Don Quixote's madness that continues to inspire interpretations of the "occult truth" supposedly hidden in the novel. Don Quixote's madness is similar to that of a visionary or a mystic. We may believe he's an initiate, someone who is able to see through the veil of Isis. He reflects upon reality on numerous occasions: "…there is always a swarm of enchanters in attendance upon us that change and alter everything with us, and turn things as they please, and according as they are disposed to aid or destroy us; thus what seems to thee a barber's basin seems to me Mambrino's helmet".

The story moves us because it sends a message of innocence and nobility: what is regarded as vile or grotesque by others is perceived as beautiful and sublime by Quixote. As Nabokov said, by the novel's end "we do not laugh at [Don Quixote] any longer. His blazon is pity, his banner is beauty. He stands for everything that is gentle, forlorn, pure, unselfish and gallant." Cervantes's legacy is more poignant when we think of what he had to endure in his life. Don Quixote suffers at the hands of fate but, just like his creator, he is able to transmute his hardships into the sublime. **FT**

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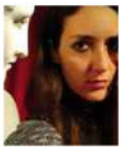

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EUREKA

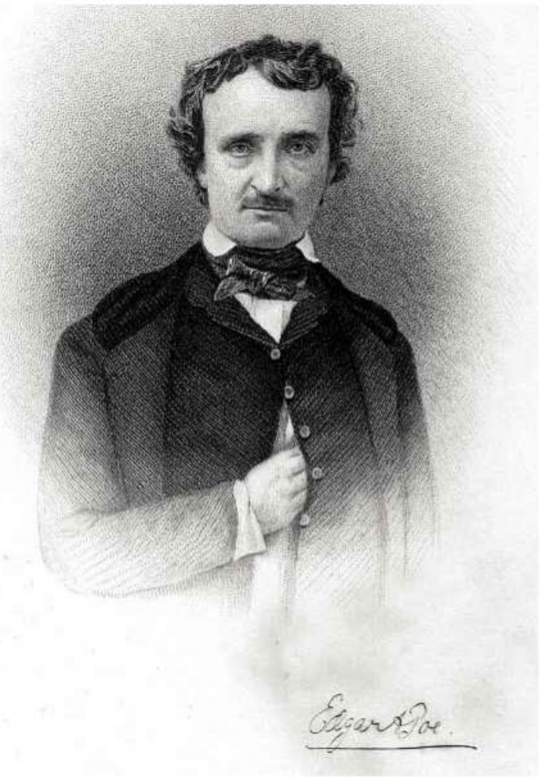
EDGAR ALLAN POE AND THE MYSTERY OF NEPTUNE'S MOONS

How did Edgar Allan Poe know that the planet Neptune had multiple moons long before they were observed by scientists? Remote viewing? Alien information? Messages from the future? **ALAN MURDIE** searches for the source of the writer's apparently supernatural astronomical insight...

Lovers of mysteries hinting at ancient alien contacts have long cited the curious case of 'Gulliver's Moons of Mars', presented by *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), where Jonathan Swift seemingly predicted the existence of two Martian moons that were not actually discovered for another 150 years.[1] It was not until 1877 that the American astronomer Asaph Hall found the Red Planet did indeed possess two dwarf moons with similar orbits to those described by Swift. How could Swift have known about these moons, since in 1726 no telescopes existed capable of resolving such small bodies?

Alas, for believers in extraterrestrial guidance, historians of astronomy consider Swift's inspiration was not Martians but Johannes Kepler, discoverer of the laws of planetary motion. Something of a mystic, Kepler believed the moons of the planets in the Solar System followed a fixed numerical progression. Venus had no moon, Earth had one and Jupiter was known to possess four. Accordingly, Kepler reasoned that Mars, orbiting between Earth and Jupiter, would have two satellites.

That Swift lifted Kepler's notion and inserted it into *Gulliver's Travels,* partly as a satire of the British Royal Society, is the explanation generally accepted as the solution of the mystery.[2] But less well known, and not yielding as readily to explanation, is a literary prediction concerning the planet Neptune. This appears in the last work of that weaver of dark romances Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) and involves the existence of undiscovered Neptunian moons and a ring, the latter only detected in 1989.



ABOVE: Edgar Allan Poe's writings embraced more than just the macabre, as *Eureka* demonstrates.

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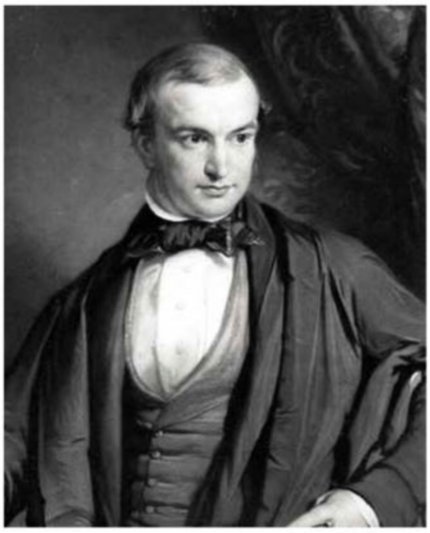
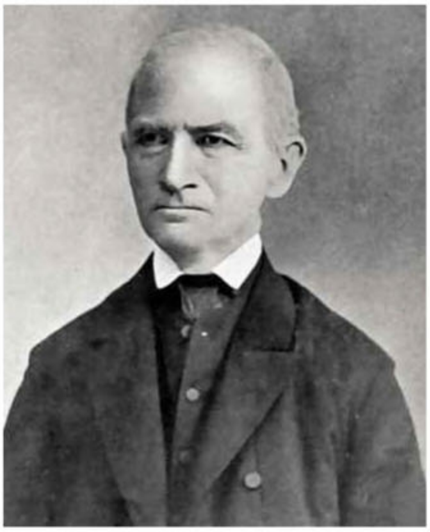
POE'S PREDICTIONS

It is not surprising that Poe, a writer capable of conceiving extremes of beauty and terror, should have been fascinated by the darkest reaches of the Solar System. The discovery of Neptune on 25 September 1846 seems to have launched him into an extended period of philosophical and mystical speculation about the formation of the Universe, culminating in his 40,000-word 'Prose Poem' entitled *Eureka: An Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe*, a treatise included in his collected works from the 1890s.[3]

Eureka is an extraordinary work by any standard, and many interpretations of it are possible. Poe seems to be attempting a fusion of science and metaphysics. In a section devoted to the creation of the Solar System, he conceives Neptune as the first planet to have formed, coalescing





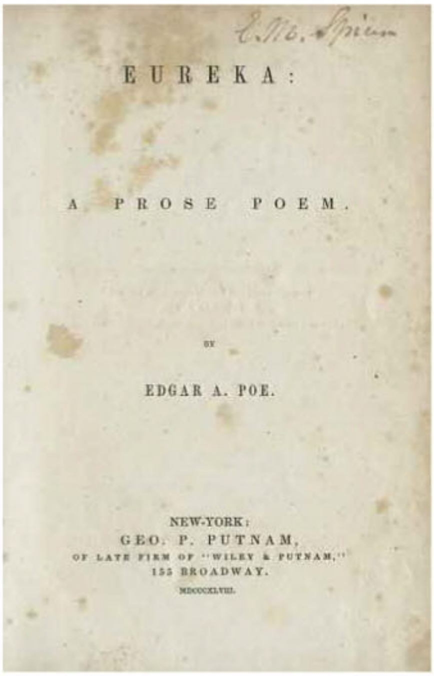
ABOVE LEFT AND CENTRE: John Couch Adams in Cambridge and Urbain Le Verrier in France, working quite independently of one another, both reached similar conclusions about the likey location of the unknown planet. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Neptune's discoverer, Johann Gottfried Galle. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The frontispiece of Poe's *Eureka: A Prose Poem*.

from an enormous gas cloud. Writing of Neptune, he argues the planet was built up from gases "which evaporated substances upon his surface, till finally his moons and his gaseous ring (if it is true that he has a ring) were produced". Poe theorises "that these moons took elliptical forms, rotated and revolved 'both under one' and were kept in their *monthly* orbits by the centrifugal force acquired in their *daily* orbits, and required a longer time to make their monthly revolutions than they would have required if they had had no daily revolutions."

Clearly, Poe envisaged Neptune possessing at least two moons and perhaps a ring, like Saturn. According to scholar Thomas Ollive Mabbott (1898-1968), Poe first proposed satellites of Neptune in a manuscript accompanying a letter dated 29 February 1848 sent to one George W Eveleth. [4] Mabbott records: "The body of the letter was mainly concerned with the lecture on "The Universe" which Poe had delivered on February 3 and was to publish in revised form". This was printed, with minor modifications, as *Eureka* in July 1848 where again Poe clearly speaks of *moons* of Neptune, as well as discussing the growth of a planetary ring.

As Mabbott realised, this poses a textual puzzle, for at the time Poe produced an early extract from this manuscript (entitled "A Prediction") Neptune was known only to have a single moon. This large satellite was named Triton and was identified by William Lassell, an astronomer living in Liverpool, just a few weeks after the planet's discovery. It was only a century after Poe's death that a second moon of Neptune, called Nereid, was discovered – in May 1949, by the astronomer Gerald Kuiper. [5]

As for Poe's prediction of a ring around the planet, Mabbott laconically stated: "Neptune has no ring". Later, in 1981, astronomers began a search for a Neptunian ring system, but it was not until 1989 that the *Voyager 2* space probe discovered Neptune did indeed possess a very faint ring system, impossible to see from Earth. [6]



E.M. Spinn

EUREKA:

A PROSE POEM.

BY

EDGAR A. POE.

NEW-YORK:
GEO. P. PUTNAM,
OF LATE FIRM OF "WILEY & PUTNAM,"
155 BROADWAY.
MDCCCXLVIII.

EDGAR ALLAN POE WAS FASCINATED BY THE DARKER REACHES OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

Neptune was famously discovered as a result of mathematical calculations undertaken to explain strange discrepancies in the orbit of the planet Uranus, which had been discovered in 1781. These deviations from the predicted orbit seemed only explicable by the gravitational pull of another large undiscovered planet further from the Sun. As the story goes, complex calculations were undertaken by John Couch Adams of Cambridge and Urbain Le Verrier in France. Working independently, in ignorance of each other, both men set out to determine the position of the unknown world, reaching similar conclusions as to where in the heavens Neptune was to be found. On 25 September 1846, the German astronomer Galle, using Le Verrier's calculations, found Neptune very close to the position pinpointed by both mathematicians. Eventually, honours were jointly shared for the discovery, which was celebrated as a monumental triumph, not just for astronomy in particular and science in general. The story has been glowingly re-told many times since. [7]

However, it was not possible to deduce from these calculations either the existence of satellites or of any ring. Beyond initially pinpointing its position, these calculations revealed no other facts about Neptune. "With a good telescope and a suitable magnifying power we can indeed see that Neptune has a disc, but no features on that disc can be identified because of its great distance from Earth," wrote Sir Robert Ball in 1891.[8] Until the tiny satellite Nereid was found, almost nothing was known with certainty about Neptune beyond its one moon, Triton, and the fact it took 164.8 years to orbit the Sun. Indeed, this yawning gap in astronomical knowledge was routinely camouflaged by generations of writers waxing lyrical about the undoubted genius of Adams and Le Verrier. So just how could Poe have known such seemingly accurate details, less than 18 months after Neptune was discovered?

MYSTERIOUS KNOWLEDGE

For believers in clairvoyance or precognition, it is tempting to think that Poe, forever dreaming of all manner of things supernatural and mystical invading the realm of matter, might have experienced some personal vision or intuitive flash of cosmic insight. [9] Certainly, a number of Poe's ideas expressed in *Eureka*, such as a cyclical Universe that contracts and expands, have parallels in modern cosmological theories of an oscillating Universe. Similarly, he predicted extra-Solar planets would be detected orbiting other stars – which astronomers at the end of the 19th century thought would be an observational impossibility. Thus, it might be argued that he possessed some paranormal ability, akin to dowsing or remote viewing, by which he was able to project his consciousness into space. Or perhaps he could psychically draw information from the future, when the discoveries had been made? Indeed, in a lengthy philosophical section of *Eureka*, he imagines being the recipient of a letter written 1,000 years in the future, from the year 2848.

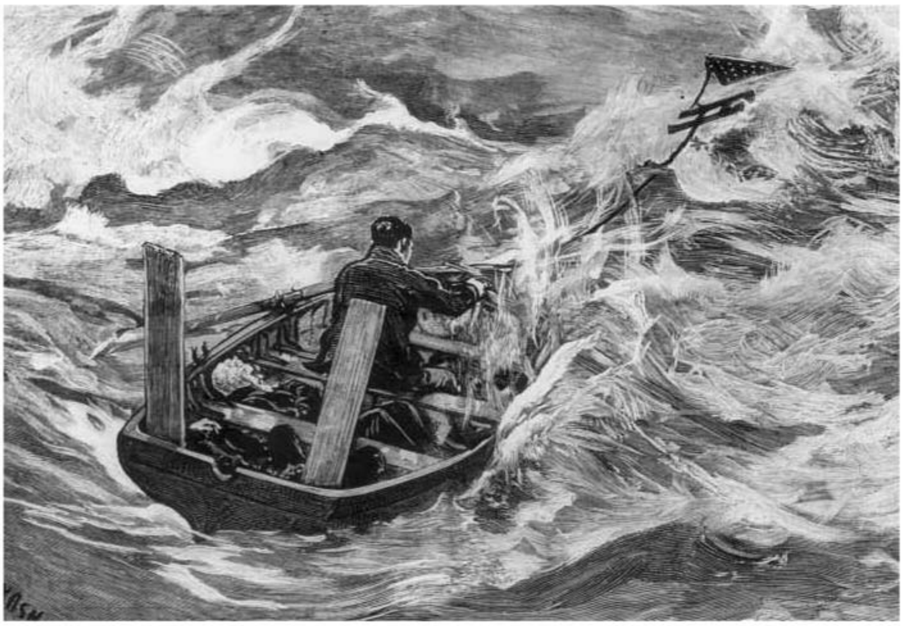
Before laughing such notions to scorn, it should be remembered that one work by Poe does provide a most astonishing instance of apparent foresight. In 1838, he published a novel called *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, a horrific tale about three shipwreck survivors adrift at sea who kill and eat a fourth after drawing lots. Their victim is a cabin boy whom Poe calls 'Richard Parker'.

Forty-six years later, in 1884, a British yacht called the *Migonette* sank en route to Australia. As in Poe's novel, there were three survivors, left adrift in a lifeboat, who after drawing lots, killed and ate a fourth: the 17-year-old cabin boy whose name was also Richard Parker! [**FT49:26**] After being rescued, the three sailors later stood trial for murder (with this instance of marine cannibalism becoming a leading influence on the necessity defence in English law). [10] Ninety years later, in 1974, 12-year-old Nigel Parker, a distant relative of the devoured cabin boy, won the £100 prize in a *Sunday Times* competition for examples of striking real-life coincidences, adjudicated by Arthur Koestler.

Alternatively, as proposed by alien contact theorists in the case of Jonathan Swift and the Moons of Mars, was Poe a recipient of data channelled from extraterrestrial sources in touch with the consciousness of a Neptunian being? Indeed, at one point in *Eureka* Poe refers to mankind as "a member of the cosmical family of Intelligences".

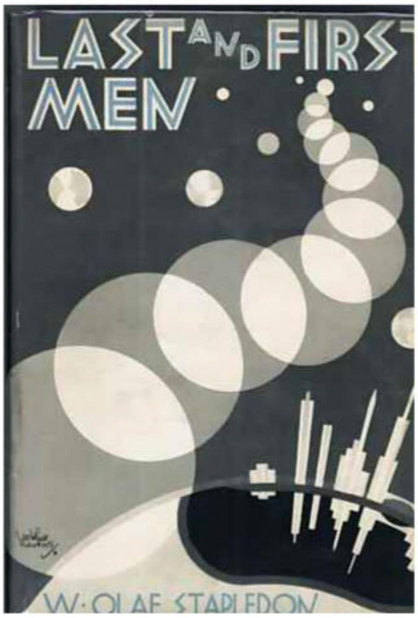
If this all sounds altogether like fantastic speculation from the realms of science fiction, indeed it is. Nearly a century after Poe, the British writer Olaf Stapledon produced two of the most profound and philosophical works of science fiction – *Last and First Men* (1930) and *Last Men in London* (1932). Stapledon's visionary works told the story of the evolution of the human race from its beginnings up until its final extinction two billion years in the future, when the Sun has swollen to a red giant, consuming the inner planets. As the Sun dies, the last descendants of humanity survive on Neptune (Pluto not then having been discovered and mankind never having left of the Solar System). These last Neptunian survivors, the 18th race of humanity, then project their consciousness back through time into the minds of 20th century human beings, some of whom typically believed they are being contacted by discarnate intelligences, such as spirits of the dead.

Of course, this is fiction, and through the centuries many great artists, composers and writers have stated that they do not know the source of their inspiration; whatever it may be, beings from Neptune are probably near the bottom of the list. It is utterly improbable that Neptune harbours life, because of its distance from the Sun and because it has an atmosphere composed of hydrogen, helium and methane with an average temperature of minus 214°C (minus 352°F). Perversely, despite being so cold, the Neptunian atmosphere is incredibly turbulent, with the fastest recorded wind speeds of any world in the Solar System – a wholly unforeseen peculiarity discovered by *Voyager 2*. Recognising its remoteness from the Sun and icy chemical conditions, few science fiction writers have ever contemplated Neptune being inhabited. Even UFO contactees have avoided citing the planet, in contrast with the legions of alien races envisaged as arriving from Mars and Venus. Only Neptune's largest moon Triton seems to have been envisaged as a possible place for life in a spin-off novelisation of the 1970s TV series *Space 1999*. Thus, even in fiction the idea of natives of Neptune is treated as almost a null hypothesis. [11]



ABOVE: The cannibal survivors of the sinking of the Mignonette; another example of Poe's seemingly supernatural foreknowledge. **BELOW:** Olaf Stapledon's Last and First Men imagines humanity surviving on Neptune.

IT IS IMPROBABLE THAT NEPTUNE HARBOURS LIFE BECAUSE OF ITS DISTANCE FROM THE SUN



NEW WORLDS

In fact, a normal human and Earth-based explanation for this mystery can be proposed. The most likely basis of Poe's belief in moons and a ring arises from the heady days of autumn 1846, in the immediate aftermath of the planet's discovery. Amid the jubilation in scientific circles, eager astronomers at once began turning their telescopes on the spot in the sky where the new world was to be seen.

It was from these excited and often hurried observations that all manner of unusual reports concerning Neptune emerged. The novelty of gazing upon a new planet, never glimpsed knowingly before (it seems Galileo may have seen Neptune as early as 1610 but can hardly be blamed for not recognising it), [12] appears to have triggered a spate of excited and wholly misleading observations on the part of astronomers, beginning when William Lassell, the Liverpudlian discoverer of Triton, thought he saw a faint ring. He was not alone. British and European observers began reporting Neptunian anomalies, variously described as rings, elliptical features, appendages projecting from the planet, or a cluster of satellites, their beliefs fuelled by rumours of confirmatory sightings from other observatories using a variety of telescopes. However, due to the deteriorating autumn skies across Europe, it was not possible to maintain the consistent observation necessary to confirm or negate their presence. Doubtless because reports were so fragmentary, a sense of excitement was sustained and proved contagious. The possibility of Neptunian rings and extra satellites crossed the Atlantic, and soon observers in the United States logged fleeting sightings of these features.[13]

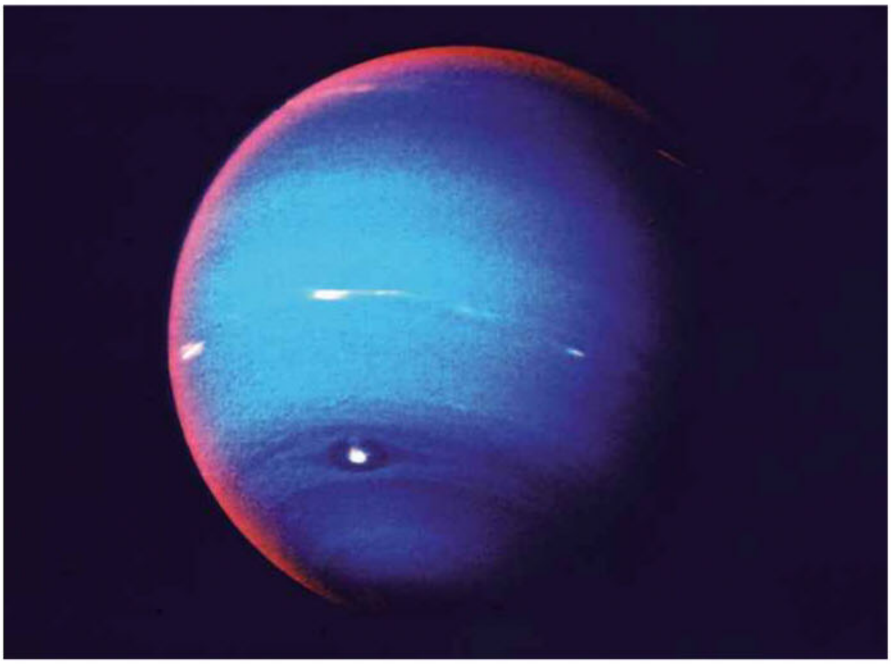
It is this contagion of misobservation reaching America that provides the explanation for Poe's beliefs in *Eureka*: they derived from the excited news and discussion of these sightings in astronomical journals and in debates in the United States. In fact, a similar mysterious ring had been suspected around Uranus immediately after its discovery, but was realised within weeks to be a telescopic illusion. With Neptune moving into a region of the sky unfavourable for observation from northern latitudes, it took some five years until all astronomers accepted that the anomalous observations, largely occurring in the period 1846-48, were wholly illusory. But by then Poe was dead.

That the excited misperceptions of 1846-48 were the source of Poe's apparent foresight was the view of the American astronomer Dennis Rawlins in correspondence with the historian of science Richard Baum in 1970.[14]

In fact, thanks to *Voyager 2*, Neptune is now known as having at least five satellites, and all four of the giant planets are recognised as possessing ring systems.

In comparison with the celebrated mathematical prediction that led to the discovery of Neptune, the observational errors of 1846-48 have been largely ignored. After reviewing surviving records, Richard Baum concludes the shared malobservations were a product of imagination and autosuggestion. By the time *Eureka* was published in full in Poe's *Collected Works* of 1891, these errors were long forgotten. It was indeed a case of "mystery and imagination", but not on the part of Poe.

One person who resolutely refused to be impressed by the story of the discovery of Neptune was Charles Fort, who launched a general attack on all celestial calculations in his book *New Lands* (1923). This was very much an instinctive broad-brush attack rather than any detailed dismantling of mathematical assumptions; basically, Fort claimed, authorities were blinding us with figures. It is therefore interesting to note the detailed critiques that have arisen since about aspects of the calculations involved, and particularly the claims advanced concerning Adams by the British astronomical establishment.[15] Le Verrier and Adams were proceeding on the basis of the now discredited Bode's Law, a mathematical sequence relating to the positioning of the planets which they applied to the 'missing' planet. In fact, Neptune departs substantially from Bode's Law, but nonetheless it was somewhat fortunate in turning up in the part of the sky corresponding exactly to where Le Verrier's calculations said it should be – another striking and rather spooky coincidence.



ABOVE: Thanks to Voyager 2, we now know that Neptune possesses at least five satellites and a ring system.

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It was also a case of psychological priming: the observers in September 1846 were mentally prepared to find a new planet, and duly recognised it when they saw it. Few would go as far to entertain the heretical possibility "that the outer planets didn't exist until we began to look for them"[16] but a case can be made that they "were in the right position for the calculations to work… Sometimes chance plays a big role in science although we might not like to admit it."[17]

Or perhaps we're only ready to perceive new phenomena when the authorities say we can see them… **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

ALAN MURDIE is a lawyer and writer with a longstanding interest in astronomy. A former president of the Ghost Club, he compiles FT's monthly Ghostwatch column as well as being a regular feature writer.

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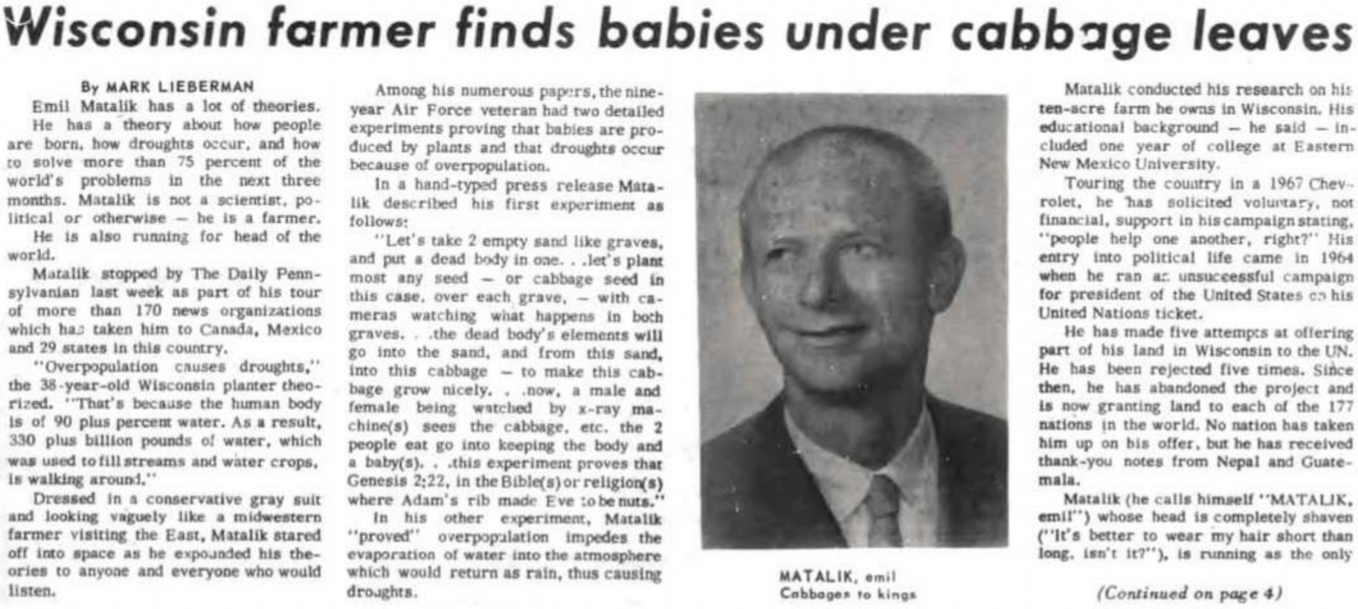
AMERICAN PSYCHOS 4 A KOOK IN EVERY HOME

Ahead of the US election, **SD TUCKER** examines the strangest independent candidates from the nation's past; men who have bravely embodied the American dream of life, liberty and the pursuit of looniness.



Wisconsin farmer finds babies under cabbage leaves

By MARK LIEBERMAN

Emil Matalik has a lot of theories.

He has a theory about how people are born, how droughts occur, and how to solve more than 75 percent of the world's problems in the next three months. Matalik is not a scientist, political or otherwise – he is a farmer.

He is also running for head of the world.

Matalik stopped by The Daily Pennsylvanian last week as part of his tour of more than 170 news organizations which has taken him to Canada, Mexico and 29 states in this country.

"Overpopulation causes droughts," the 38-year-old Wisconsin planter theorized. "That's because the human body is of 90 plus percent water. As a result, 330 plus billion pounds of water, which was used to fill streams and water crops, is walking around."

Dressed in a conservative gray suit and looking vaguely like a midwestern farmer visiting the East, Matalik stared off into space as he expounded his theories to anyone and everyone who would listen.

Among his numerous papers, the nine-year Air Force veteran had two detailed experiments proving that babies are produced by plants and that droughts occur because of overpopulation.

In a hand-typed press release Matalik described his first experiment as follows:

"Let's take 2 empty sand like graves, and put a dead body in one. . .let's plant most any seed – or cabbage seed in this case, over each grave, – with cameras watching what happens in both graves. . .the dead body's elements will go into the sand, and from this sand, into this cabbage – to make this cabbage grow nicely. . .now, a male and female being watched by x-ray machine(s) sees the cabbage, etc. the 2 people eat go into keeping the body and a baby(s). . .this experiment proves that Genesis 2:22, in the Bible(s) or religion(s) where Adam's rib made Eve to be nuts."

In his other experiment, Matalik "proved" overpopulation impedes the evaporation of water into the atmosphere which would return as rain, thus causing droughts.

MATALIK, emil
Cabbages to kings

Matalik conducted his research on his ten-acre farm he owns in Wisconsin. His educational background – he said – included one year of college at Eastern New Mexico University.

Touring the country in a 1967 Chevrolet, he has solicited voluntary, not financial, support in his campaign stating, "people help one another, right?" His entry into political life came in 1964 when he ran an unsuccessful campaign for president of the United States on his United Nations ticket.

He has made five attempts at offering part of his land in Wisconsin to the UN. He has been rejected five times. Since then, he has abandoned the project and is now granting land to each of the 177 nations in the world. No nation has taken him up on his offer, but he has received thank-you notes from Nepal and Guatemala.

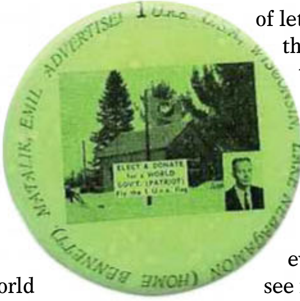
Matalik (he calls himself "MATALIK, emil") whose head is completely shaven ("It's better to wear my hair short than long, isn't it?"), is running as the only

(Continued on page 4)

ABOVE: "I'm running for head of the world" – the *Daily Pennslyvanian* reports on Emil Matalik on 22 Jan 1968. **BELOW:** Matalik campaign buttons.

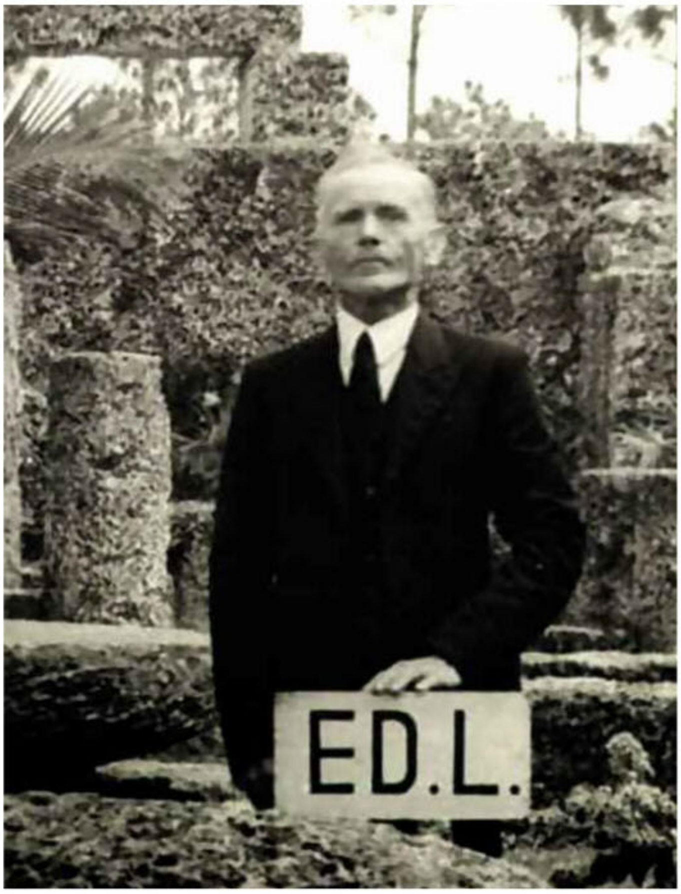
ACTIVATE THE CUBE!

An even more light-headed politician than anti-gravity warrior Roger Babson (see **FT339:48-50**) was Emil Matalik (1929-2008) – or 'MATALIK, emil', as he preferred to call himself, a possible echo of daily roll-calls in the US Air Force, from which fine body of men he had apparently been medically discharged after nine years following a nasty bump on the head. It must have been a pretty severe injury. Not only did it necessitate a metal-plate being inserted into his skull (or so he boasted), it also appeared to send him totally insane. Matalik's first tilt at the Presidency came in 1964, on behalf of his self-invented One United Nations Organisation (OUNO). Initially, his idea was to try and attain world peace by calling for the UN to govern the entire globe. To this end, he encouraged all landowners and nations to donate their property to the UN, which would then redistribute it equally, giving every household "one animal and one tree" (an early OUNO slogan) to live off. Matalik's main promise if and when he became President was to give the entire United States away; and he made a fine start by writing a series of letters to the UN, gifting them his farm. Eventually, they wrote back, telling him to stop. It was illegal for any US citizen to gift territory to a foreign power or international body, so they told him to keep his land. Outraged, Matalik wrote to the government of every other nation on Earth, to see if they wanted his plot instead. Only Nepal and Guatemala replied. They too said no.


MATALIK, EMIL ADVERTISE! 1 U.n.o. U.S.A. WISCONSIN,
(HOME BENNETT)
ELECT & DONATE for a WORLD GOV'T (PATRIOT) Fly the 1 U.n.o. Flag

UNITED NATIONS PARTY
EMIL MATALIK FOR PRESIDENT
ONE WORLD

Diversifying, Matalik changed his Party's name to 1-UNITED nature's organisation party (1-Unop) and campaigned on environmental issues instead. The new numeral was a reflection of Matalik's own personal numbering system, which he had created "to keep track of things" when, as he planned, every person, place and *thing* in the world was given its own special identification number (just as, one supposes, he had once had in the military). Worse, he started giving interviews about experiments he claimed to have performed on his farm, 'proving' that babies grew from cabbages, like little mandrake-root homunculi. It's hard to tell precisely what he did in these experiments, but the following account, taken from a hand-typed press-release, gives us a clue, of sorts: "Let's take two empty sand-like graves, and put a dead body in one… let's plant most any seed – or cabbage seed in this case – over each grave



LEFT: Ed Leedskalnin – half Man In Black, half escapee from Kraftwerk. **BELOW:** Ed's magnum opus, *A Book in Every Home*.

– with cameras watching what happens in both graves... the dead body's elements will go into the sand, and from this sand, into this cabbage – to make this cabbage grow nicely... now, a male and female being watched by X-ray machine(s) sees the cabbage, etc. The two people eat go into keeping the body and a baby(s)... this experiment proves that Genesis 2:22, in the Bible(s) or religion(s) where Adam's rib made Eve to be nuts." Needless to say, that's [*sic*] throughout.

Did Matalik really not know where babies came from? He never married ("I never met a woman who thought the way I do"), but was at least raised on a farm, so surely he must have had some inkling? One of his other policies was to encourage free love and birth control, so maybe he just wanted mothers to grow cabbage-patch kids instead of doing it the old-fashioned way, perhaps in the name of women's lib.

Proclaiming he could solve 75 per cent of the world's problems within a mere three months, Matalik started telling people of his theory that the Earth was just a gigantic sphere of water, the crust being formed from layers of accumulated space dust. However, there was a problem. There were too many people in the world, and their combined weight was pressing down on the crust, making it crack and sending out bursts of hot, dirty water, killing people – a phenomenon known by most geologists as 'lava' being expelled from 'volcanoes'. Worse, seeing as the human body is made up of 90 per cent water, "330-plus billion pounds of water, which was [once] used to fill streams and water crops, is walking around" in human form, causing droughts. Even more frightening, much of our remaining water was being lost into outer space, floating away through evaporation. Matalik's solution was ingenious: a giant glass cube had to be constructed around our planet to keep it all in. Then water would condense on the cube's internal walls and fall back down to Earth as rain, benefitting all those dehydrated Ethiopians.

Matalik never gained a single vote. This was largely because he never registered properly as a full candidate, merely wandered around the country – and Canada and Mexico – promoting his ideas and claiming to be running for President *even when there wasn't an election*. In any case, he didn't approve of voting, and never did so himself. Matalik did, however, once seek a Vice-Presidential running mate, placing an advert for a "wise Chinese lady" to stand alongside him in a local paper. If the female members of Wisconsin's Chinese community really were wise, they would have stayed well away. [1]

THE BOOK HAS TO BE READ FACING EAST IN ORDER TO BE PROPERLY DIGESTED

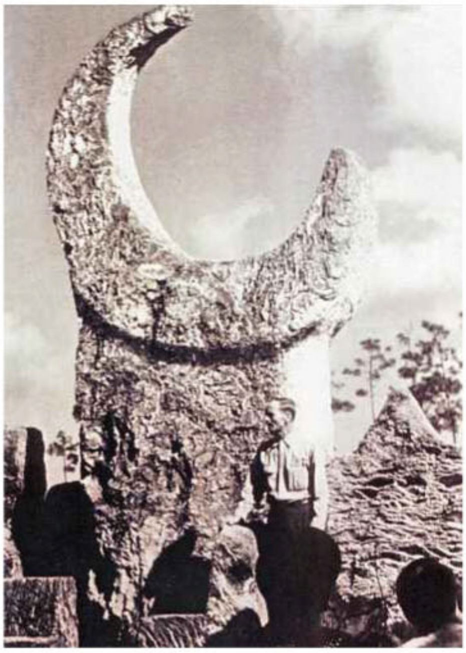
A BOOK
IN EVERY
HOME

LOCK UP YOUR DAUGHTERS

Not every strange American political figure has had the courage to put their name forward on the ballot-paper, though, preferring instead to impart their wisdom from the sidelines – and what wisdom it has been. Take the case of Edward Leedskalnin (1887-1951). Leedskalnin is best known today for his creation of a place called Coral Castle in Florida. He had immigrated to the US from Latvia in 1912 to try and get over being jilted at the altar by his 16-year-old child-bride, Agnes Scuffs. Working in complete isolation from 1923 onwards, with primitive tools made from bits of an old car, trained stonemason Leedskalnin somehow managed to erect a highly impressive home carved from local coral-rock and filled with various symbolic structures, which he later opened to the public – distributing free sausages to children as an added bonus. Here, when not fantasising about his lost love, Leedskalnin devoted himself to devising a new theory of magnetism, performing all kinds of bizarre experiments, such as wrapping magnets up in cobwebs in order to prove... well, in order to prove something.

His 1945 booklet *Magnetic Current* is written in such broken English that it is almost impossible to understand. However, as its first sentence explains, it has to be read whilst facing east in order for it to be properly digested, so perhaps my armchair was just incorrectly aligned: "This writing is lined up so when you read it you look East, and all the description you will read about magnetic current, it will be just as good for your electricity". Some extracts, meanwhile, appear to show Ed was trying to use random foodstuffs to generate electro-magnetic power: "If I make a battery with copper for positive terminal and beef for negative terminal, I get more magnets out of it than when I used copper for positive terminal and sweet-potato for negative terminal. From this you can see that no two things are alike".

Leedskalnin's appearance was every bit as odd as his prose-style; photos show a tall, thin, serious-looking man dressed in undertaker-like garb: half Man In Black, half escapee from Kraftwerk. Because of



ABOVE LEFT: Ed in the gardens of Coral Castle, the bizarre home he started constructing in 1923 using tools created from bits of an old car. He continued to work on it for the next 28 years. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Ed giving a lecture about astronomy; he also distributed free sausages to younger visitors. **BELOW:** Some of Ed's odd symbolic structures.

his amazing architectural accomplishments, all kinds of unlikely myths have sprung up about Ed in recent decades, claiming he had power over gravity, or, like Orpheus crossed with Nikola Tesla, could make rocks levitate simply by singing to them. Others linked Coral Castle to UFOs, saying it was an energy-recharging station for alien scout-ships. Ed claimed to know how the ancient Egyptians had built their pyramids, and to have used such methods in the construction of his own fortress. To him, this simply meant that he had mastered some very complex techniques of engineering and stonework; how was he to know that, in later years, the dubious influence of Erich von Däniken would cause the terminally gullible to completely misinterpret his words?

As well as a builder of wonders and master of magnetism, Leedskalnin was also an amateur political theorist. Included in his castle was a big stone slab carved in the shape of Florida and surrounded by coral rocking-chairs, where he planned to allow the State Governor to hold his meetings. The Governor never came, though, perhaps scared away by his host's rather extreme ideas. Ed's 1936 pamphlet, *A Book in Every Home*, is not so much a political manifesto as a way of life. At first, it seems quite welcoming. Leedskalnin left every second page blank and invited readers to write their own ideas there if they disagreed with him "and see if you can do better". Later on, though, the pamphleteer seems to become more certain in his viewpoint. "All books that are written are wrong," explains Leedskalnin, and anyone who disagrees with his thinking is wrong too. "I would say you are wrong yourself," Ed tells his readers, "because you came into this world through natural circumstances that you had nothing to do with, and so as long as such a thing exists as yourself, I am right and you are wrong."

But what, exactly, was Ed so right about? Apparently, he was espousing an extreme form of Social Darwinism, in which the poor and weak went to the wall whilst the fitter and more productive prospered. Look at any living creature, Leedskalnin explains, and you will see it has a "natural tendency" to relax; "as soon as they fill up [with food], they will lie down." Welfare state scroungers are a typical example of this tendency, lazing around and doing nothing useful. Therefore, Ed concluded, only those who pay taxes should be allowed to vote, and the richer you are, the more votes you will be assigned. By Ed, of course. All of the "loafers and weaklings" who cannot support themselves simply "weaken the state" by asking for something for nothing, he says. The solution Ed proposed was simple: mass-starvation. "If you want to eat, you will have to eat for yourself… Nobody can eat for you, and so it is that if you want the things to eat you will have to produce them yourself and if you are too weak, too lazy, lack machinery and good management to produce them, then you should perish and that is all there is to it." Indeed, "the sooner [layabouts] perish the better it will be."

If you did not perish, though, then what kind of world would you be left to inherit? A very peculiar one indeed, in which all of society's structures were to be redirected towards one new, super-important goal; maintaining the sexual purity and smooth skin of 16-year-old girls for the pleasure of the jilted Ed. Obsessively referring to such

CHRISTINA RUTZ / CREATIVE COMMONS

YOU WILL BE
SEEING UNUSUAL
ACCOMPLISHMENT
ED.

ABOVE LEFT: An inscription at the entrance to Coral Castle promises wonders within – although in Ed's typical broken English.
ABOVE RIGHT: Ed was quick to open Coral Castle to the public and conducted tours of his bizarre work-in-progress until his death in 1951.

creatures as "Sweet Sixteens", just like his former love, Leedskalnin spoke of his desire to find a truly "brand new one" who had never been "soiled" by the wandering hands of a schoolboy "patting, rubbing and squeezing her" during a Church picnic. Such a procedure turns a girl into nothing but "dead flesh" for middle-aged Latvians, it seems. However, it's really not the girl's fault if she should fall victim to such unfortunate adolescent urges. Instead, "the mamma is to blame!" Given that adult women have already been ruined by time and childbirth, Leedskalnin proposed that whenever a young boy shows an interest in her daughter, any responsible mother should voluntarily act as "an experimental station" for the lad to practise on. Already polluted by man, "nothing can hurt her any more… and so, in her case, it would be all right." Would it? "Now I will tell you about soiling," Ed continues, disturbingly.

Quickly moving on, we will find Leedskalnin's explanation of the New Model Household, which should be devoted wholly to raising Sweet Sixteens in perfect physical condition with no external blemishes whatsoever. "In my 30 years of studying conditions and their effects," says Ed, he has come to the following conclusions.

Firstly, like fellow single-issue obsessive Jamie Oliver, he thinks that the nation's mammas are causing a childhood obesity epidemic through their lack of nutritional knowledge: "Don't raise the girls too big by over-feeding them and too curved by neglect".

Secondly: "Girls should take smaller steps than boys. By taking smaller steps the body would not jump as much up and down or swing from side to side". Teenage girls are also far too cross-eyed. Therefore, their eyes "should be trained to look in the middle between both lids, never through the forehead," otherwise they will end up with creased brows. Most seriously, "the girl's looks are her best asset", and so "one with a disfigured face cannot be satisfied."

The biggest single cause of female facial disfiguration, it seems, is inappropriate smiling, which must be stamped out as a matter of the highest national priority. "Especially should a girl be careful not to show abnormally big mouth," cautions Ed, lest she get into bad habits. "I have seen moving-picture stars, public singers and others with their mouths so wide open that you would think the person lacks refinement" by foolishly displaying such an "enormous opening" he confides. Worse, "smiling in due time will produce creases in the sides of [girls'] mouths," making them ugly. The only solution is for America's mothers to be re-educated into keeping constant watch on their kids' mouths during infancy. "The first thing the mothers should do is to watch the baby's mouth so it is not hanging open. The mouth, by hanging open, stretches the upper lip… [until] when fully grown, the lips will not fit together any more… Children while they are growing should be watched, closely. They are stretching their mouths with their fingers and are jamming too big objects in their mouths and making too ugly faces. All those actions should be forbidden for the future's sake." And then, come that glorious day when the perfect-mouthed baby is a baby no more… Unhappy Birthday, Sweet Sixteen. [2]

In conclusion, and all mocking aside, we should note that had any of these men lived somewhere less committed to personal liberty, they would have been sent straight to the salt-mines for daring to have such independent minds. In a strange kind of way, through their heroic eccentricity, such political heretics as Babson, Donnelly, Leedskalnin, Matalik and their ilk have helped keep the rest of America free. Maybe they deserved a few votes after all. FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

SD TUCKER is a regular contributor to FT whose books are *Paranormal Merseyside*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and (forthcoming) *The Hidden Folk*. His *Great British Eccentrics* is available now from Amberley Publishing.

NOTES

1 *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, 22 Jan 1968 (available online); http://home.pacifier.com/~dkossy/matalik.html

2 Rusty McClure & Jack Heffron, *Coral Castle: The Mystery of Ed Leedskalnin and His American Stonehenge*, 2009, Ternary Publishing; Edward Leedskalnin, *A Book in Every Home*, 1936; Edward Leedskalnin, *Magnetic Current*, 1945; John Michell, Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions, 1984, pp84-88. Some have tried to claim that Leedskalnin's nonsensical manifesto is so incomprehensible because it contains hidden messages revealing the secrets of anti-gravity. In this interpretation, the 'Sweet Sixteen' he constantly refers to is not his teenage dream, but something unknown and of deep numerological significance – honest, officer.

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HAVE YOUR SAY

forum

Divorce your demons!

REV PETER LAWS reports on how a legal solution can help end a diabolically bad relationship...

REV PETER LAWS is an ordained Baptist minister with a penchant for the macabre. He writes a regular column for *FT* and his first novel, *Purged*, is out in 2017.

So how's your marriage? No, not that one… I mean the *other* one – the one where you got hitched to the Canaanite God Baal.

Maybe you were too drunk to remember it. But according to an influential group of American evangelicals, it's the reason our society is so totally messed up right now. We're *all* married, apparently, to the ancient God of storms and fertility, and it has caused everything from poor health to the economic crisis. And the reason your prayers go unanswered isn't even a lack of faith – it's all Baal's doing. Like one of those annoyingly tall defenders in basketball, he constantly blocks you with his wavy hands. Make a dunk for something good and he slaps it into failure. Even if you've never seen him in the flesh, in the spiritual realm you really are married.

He isn't just any old ancient god either. Baal, they say, is the ruler of *all* demons, the executor of Satan's will, a sort of anti-Christ, or the beast with 1,000 faces. He's behind Baphomet, Pan, Adonis, Dagon, Apollo, Zeus and many more. Ancient Egyptians brought him to America, leaving their carvings along US waterways to dedicate the land to him. So how do you get out of this tricky relationship? Thankfully, there's a solution: you need a formal divorce.

Calling it quits with a deity might be the quintessential 'messy breakup', but Dr John Benefiel has been travelling the world these last few years, showing people exactly how it's done. He's a former financial advisor turned 'apostle', who founded the Church on the Rock in Oklahoma City, along with his wife Judith, in 1991. It's an influential ministry, with a network of over 6,000 churches worldwide. But it was when John's book came out in 2012 that he started a mini-revolution in the 'spiritual warfare' market.[1]

Binding the Strongman Over America has lots of fans. They argue that its 254 pages amount to the "best spiritual warfare book available today". Some adverts claim that if you read it, you'll "receive the ancient keys to have your prayers answered immediately". A $45 DVD box set of teachings is also available. Naturally, Benefiel started appearing on popular Christian TV shows. One was *Sid Roth's: It's Supernatural*. In the half-hour show, Benefiel told a giddy, eager audience (and an even giddier host) about two legal documents available for free download from his website as handy PDFs.

The key file is the Divorce Decree itself, which comes in both personal and corporate versions. Individuals, businesses and even local governments have all used these forms to break their invisible bonds with Baal. The Christian is listed as plaintiff, and the defendant is Baal, all under the jurisdiction of 'The Highest Court of the Kingdom of God'. According to the decree, the aforementioned union was based on the lies and deceit of the defendant. What's more, "all offspring of the Marriage have been still-born or have had viability for only brief periods". In other words, the plaintiff has no obligation to care for any metaphorical children that were sired during the relationship. There's even an everlasting restraining order, to keep the defendant away from "all persons and property belonging to the Plaintiff".

The issue of property is a big feature, because in this divorce, the Christian makes off like a bandit. As the innocent party they're "entitled to have sole right, claim, and interest, in and to all the gifts, possessions and inheritance from the Plaintiff's Father". Baal, the Defendant, is barred from all such treasures. It's a key part of Benefiel's theology, which fuses the prosperity gospel with spiritual warfare. A formal divorce will unlock what he calls the "Great Wealth Transfer" to the Church. Christians have the right to 'plunder' Baal's wealth and take what they're owed. Which is everything. Baal must be giving that old Jerry Reed song a lot of plays on Spotify: "She Got the Goldmine; I Got the Shaft".

Benefiel has connections in government – he was even linked to recent presidential hopeful Rick Perry – so he's been able to institute the Divorce Decree in the halls of local power. This, he claims, is why Oklahoma City still gets named as one of the most recession-proof cities in the US. And that's not all. In a supplementary document on his site, he says the decree has brought higher incomes, fairer taxes and supernatural signs. For example, a local 'apostle' bred a white female buffalo – an ultra-rare symbol of spiritual favour in Native American religion. Benefiel claims the Divorce Decree did that, as well as causing local earthquakes that left cracks and crumbles in significant US landmarks, like the Washington Monument – all idols of a corrupt, Baal-inspired America.

Considering Baal's a sneaky tyke, you'd expect him to find some way around the Decree. Thankfully, a second document is bundled with the first. The Writ of Assistance enforces the divorce conditions, with angels binding Baal and plundering his spoils. The Christian has responsibility too. Each must sign a declaration, not just for themselves, but on behalf of their family *and* future generations. They must tithe and give to the Church, be pro-life, and certainly never be gay, a witch, a Goth or a vampire. One assumes that anybody who is all four is beyond hope and might as well stick with Baal; after all, they'd make a great couple.

FT readers may chuckle (or shiver) at all this. Hardline Biblicists might even bring up Malachi 2:16, which has God saying that he 'hates' divorce. Yet Benefiel and others are indicative of something fascinating: Christian movements that fuse far-right politics with ritualistic, almost magical, evangelicalism. Don't expect these sorts of stories to dry up. They'll grow. Especially when ditching Baal doesn't just bring untold spiritual freedom – you might get a new yacht as well. **FT**

BELOW: A bronze Baal figurine (circa 12-14th century BC) found at Ras Shamra, Syria.

NOTES

[1] Spiritual warfare is a wider Christian movement in which some believers use ritual and 'props' to empower their prayers. For example, one online company offers a 'House Cleansing Kit', which comes with a plastic bottle of oil and wooden stakes you hammer into the ground around your house to cleanse the place of demonic spirits. Traditional Bible thumpers dismiss it as nothing more than a sort of Christian paganism and magic.

The Hairy Man of St Trinian's

CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE explores a strange figure from the Isle of Man's rich folkloric past and wonders whether the shaggy Phynnodderee might be an ancient precursor of Gef the Talking Mongoose...

CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE is a library cataloguer and writer, whose work has appeared in *FT*, *Abraxas* and *Faunus*. His book about Gef the Talking Mongoose will be published this autumn by Strange Attractor Press.

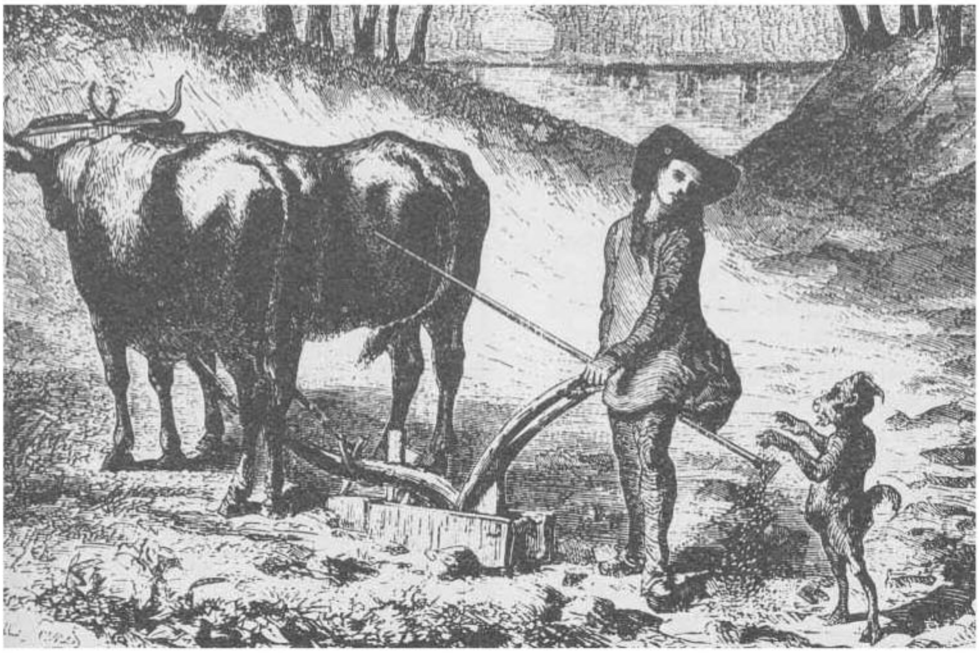
Whilst researching the folklore, myths and legends of the Isle of Man, I recently came across a curious tale, that of the *Phynnodderee* of St Trinian's. The Island is particularly rich in folklore – the result of Celtic, Norse and Christian influences – the Island's folklore being populated by numerous fairies, giants, witches, hobs, brownies, black dogs, water-bulls, water-horses, and other unclassifiable apparitions.

A *Phynnodderee* (or *Fynoderee*, *Fenodyree* – spellings vary) is a hairy, human-like entity, thought to possess great strength. His appearance is noteworthy: he is covered in black, shaggy hair, and has fiery, glowing eyes. Etymologically speaking, the name means something like "the hairy one." [1]

The Manx translation of the Bible employs the term *Phynnodderee* in place of 'satyr': *Hig beishtyn oaldey yn aasagh dy cheilley marish beishtyn oaldey yn ellan, as nee yn phynnodderree gyllagh da e heshey* = "The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow." (Isaiah 34: 14).

As a household fairy or goblin, the Manx *Phynnodderee* was of particular interest to me as a potential cousin to Gef the Talking Mongoose (for the full story of the remarkable 'Dalby spook' case of the 1930s, see my feature "Gef the Talking Mongoose', **FT269:32-40**). Such domestic fairies appear under various names in British and Irish folklore, as hobs, hobmen or brownies (for more on hobs, see **FT330:58-59**).

Like Gef, the *Phynnodderee* could be useful and hardworking, helping out with farm chores if given food and drink. But both were quick to take offence if they felt they had been treated with insufficient respect. Typical farm work undertaken by *Phynnodderees* might include threshing, mowing and locating lost sheep. At the Irving's isolated, remote farm, Doarlish Cashen, Gef assisted his adoptive family by catching rabbits, which he would leave outside the farmhouse door. These were welcome gifts, both as a supplement to the Irvings' limited diet, and as an additional source of income for the poverty-stricken household when sold in Dalby village. Gef was also reported to have kept the farm outbuildings free from rats, and to have warned the Irvings of intruders.



ABOVE: A lubin – a French equivalent of an English hob or boggart – bewitches a Norman ploughboy.

He looks after cattle during the day, asking only for a bowl of milk

Thomas Keightley, in his *The Fairy Mythology: Illustrative of the Romance and Superstition of Various Countries* (an extensive 19th-century overview of various European fairy traditions) tells us that the "Phynnodderee, or Hairy-one, is a Manks spirit of the same kind with the Brownie or Kobold." [2] He also says of the *Phynnodderee* that:

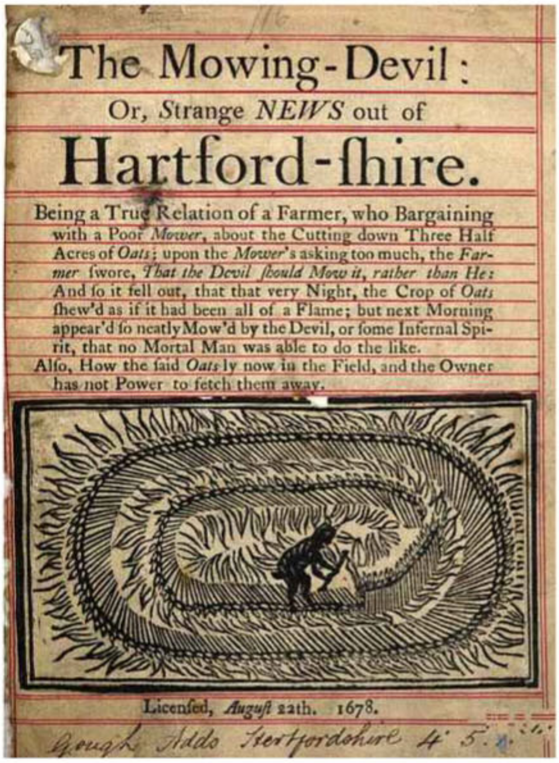
His residence is the hollow of the old tree, a ruined castle, or the abode of man. He is attached to particular families, with whom he has been known to reside, even for centuries, threshing the corn, cleaning the house, and doing everything done by his northern and English brethren. [3]

One purported origin for the *Phynnodderree* has it that he was once a fairy, who incurred the wrath of the Elfin King by falling in love with a mortal Manx woman. Noting his absence at the harvest dance that regularly took place at the fairy court of Glen Rushen, [4] the King banished him from the court and condemned him to the life of a solitary wanderer upon the bleak Manx mountains and hills.

You may hear his voice on the desert hill
When the mountain winds have power;
'Tis a wild lament for his buried love,
And his long lost Fairy Bower. [5]

The *Phynnodderee's* love for a mortal woman thus endeared him to the Manx people, as did his helpful nature. He looks after cattle during the day and night, asking only for a bowl of warm milk. He is also known for his assistance when heavy or large objects are required to be moved from one place to another, or with time-consuming tasks such as ploughing. Thus, a man wishing to build a house at the foot of Snaefell mountain, at a place named Tholt-e-will, was aided by a compliant *Phynnodderee* who, in one night, moved a large number of heavy stones – including a huge piece of white quartz, much coveted by the man for his new home – up from the beach to the mountainside. Like the Scottish brownie or Welsh *pwca*, then, he is generally friendly towards humans, but the *Phynnodderee*, if slighted, can become moody or even malevolent:

> *The phynnodderee also cut down and gathered in meadow-grass, which would have been injured if allowed to remain exposed to the coming storm. On one occasion a farmer having expressed his displeasure with the spirit for not having cut his grass close enough to the ground, the hairy one in the following year allowed the dissatisfied farmer to cut it down himself, but went after him stubbing up the roots so fast that it was with difficulty the farmer escaped having his legs cut off by the angry sprite. For several years afterwards no person could be found to mow the meadow, until a fearless soldier, from one of the garrisons, at length undertook the task. He commenced in the centre of the field, and by cutting round as if on the edge of a circle, keeping one eye on the progress of the* yiarn foldyragh *or scythe, while the other*
>
> *"Was turned round with prudent care,*
> *Lest Phynnodderee catched him unaware,"*
>
> *he succeeded in finishing his task unmolested. This field, situate in the parish of Marown, hard by the ruins of the old church of St. Trinian's, is, from the circumstance just related, still called yn lheenaee rhunt, or the Round Meadow.* [6]



The Mowing-Devil:
Or, Strange *NEWS* out of
Hartford-ſhire.

Being a True Relation of a Farmer, who Bargaining with a Poor *Mower*, about the Cutting down Three Half Acres of *Oats*; upon the *Mower*'s asking too much, the *Farmer* ſwore, *That the Devil ſhould Mow it, rather than He*: And ſo it fell out, that that very Night, the Crop of *Oats* ſhew'd as if it had been all of a Flame; but next Morning appear'd ſo neatly Mow'd by the Devil, or ſome Infernal Spirit, that no Mortal Man was able to do the like.
Alſo, How the ſaid *Oats* ly now in the Field, and the Owner has not Power to fetch them away.

Licenſed, *Auguſt* 22th. 1678.

Gough Adds Hertfordshire 4° 5.

ABOVE: The Mowing Devil in a 17th century pamphlet.

There is an echo here of the peculiar circular design of certain Cornish churches, said to be constructed this way so that the Devil could not lurk round a corner and catch a person unawares. Perhaps one might also posit that this association of straight lines with malevolent spirits or demons lay in a distant memory of early Christian fear and suspicion of leys or ghost paths, having, as they did, a pre-Christian origin.

I have, unfortunately, found no contemporary illustrative matter to accompany this tale. But I was reminded of the 17th century pamphlet, *The Mowing-Devil: or, Strange News out of Hartford-shire* (London?, 1678) [7] and its woodcut illustration.

The pamphlet recounts the story of a farmer, who, in negotiating a fee with a "poor Mower" to cut three acres of oats, is so dissatisfied with the mower's wage demands that he exclaimed he would rather the Devil himself do the work. That night, the farmer is disconcerted to see flames in his fields, and finds the next day that the oats have been cut in neat circles, too neat a job for a human hand... This tale has long been held by students of the crop circle mystery to be an early instance of the phenomenon.

Might the Manx soldier's unusual grass-cutting technique in the *Phynnodderee* story constitute an attempt to explain, after the fact, the appearance of a crop circle on the Island? Admittedly, the classic crop circle does not evince cut-down or trimmed grasses, but rather, the grass or cereal having been seemingly trampled or flattened. But the general appearance would be the same, and the Round Meadow's being cut from the middle outwards, in a circular pattern, is most suggestive. FT

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NOTES

[1] Although whether this derives from Manx (Celtic) or Old Norse is open to debate. Archibald Cregeen, in his *Manx Dictionary* argued for the name being a compound of *fynneyi*, 'hair,' and *oashyr*, 'a stocking'; hence, the man whose legs are hairy. But as Sir John Rhys pointed out, *oashyr* appears to have its origin in Old Norse *hosur*, the plural of *hosa*, that is, 'hose or stocking.'

[2] London, HG Bohn, 1860 (p402); first published London, WH Ainsworth, 1828.

[3] Ibid, pp357-358.

[4] Glen Rushen is just a couple of miles away from Doarlish Cashen, home to the 'Dalby Spook' (alias Gef the Talking Mongoose) in the 1930s. Some commentators, including myself, view Gef as a modern, twentieth-century equivalent of the helpful brownie or house fairy.

[5] Chapter XVIII, 'Popular Superstitions'; from *Historical and statistical account of the Isle of Man from the earliest times to the present date, with a view of its ancient laws, peculiar customs, and popular superstitions*, Joseph Train (Douglas: Mary Quiggin; London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1845). Train credits this rhyme to Mrs E. S. Craven Green.

[6] Ibid.

[7] *The Mowing Devil* was rediscovered by Bob Rickard and Paul Sieveking some 30 years ago and featured in an FT article (**FT53:38**, Winter 1989). This was during a period when the crop circle phenomenon was attracting much interest and speculation. The title had caught Sieveking's eye in 1982, whilst working as a layout artist on the revised British Library Catalogue of Printed Books (BLC), as was Bob Rickard, who subsequently located the original pamphlet in the BL itself. Oddly enough, UFO investigators Jenny Randles and Paul Fuller (who were, at the time, also investigating crop circles – the simpler variety, they believed, being formed by natural vortices) had independently come upon a reference to the pamphlet's existence around the same time. Something in the air?!

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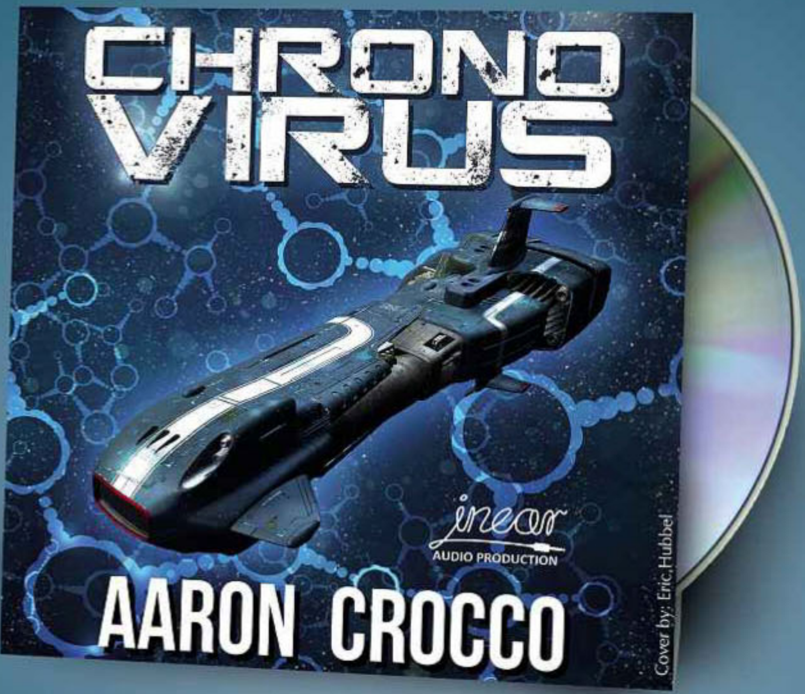

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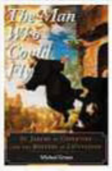
reviews

The true glory of paradise

A study of St Joseph of Copertino, whose prolific ecstasies and levitations were widely recorded, delves into shamanic trance states and the “new science of spirits”



The Man Who Could Fly

St Joseph of Copertino and the Mystery of Levitation

Michael Grosso

Roman and Littlefield 2016
Hb, 264pp, notes, bib, ind, $38.00, ISBN 9781442256729
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £20.95

In his pioneering survey of accounts of levitation (*Levitation*, 1928), Olivier Leroy – the French writer on religious miracles – devised a detailed process for sifting over 200 reports of levitation, to eliminate unverifiable, fradulent or erroneous cases. It resulted in a small but impressive number of authentic cases. He then challenged those who declare, *a priori*, that levitation is impossible, an illusion, an error or fraudulent, to pick any of those that had passed his tests – he suggested that of St Joseph of Copertino as it stood out above the others – to demonstrate its weakness by exposing any fraud or error that he had missed. His wry conclusion – “Such a test has never been tried” – has stood for nearly nine decades. While Michael Grosso’s study is not a direct response to Leroy’s challenge, it certainly answers it. Both researchers would agree that, with around 150 sworn depositions by multiple witnesses, you could hardly find a more suitable or significant example of bodily levitation – a topic which polarises opinion between the extreme views of science and religion. Where my own project is to extend Leroy’s work into a general survey of accounts of levitation from across diverse religions, cultures, eras and philosophies, Grosso concentrates on the singularity that is the life and feats of St Joseph.

What makes the case of Joseph Mary Desa (1603–1663, canonised in 1767) important is not just the number of elevations in his lifetime – more than 100 recorded in official depositions and a great many more inferred from private and less well-documented accounts – but that the duration, distance and height of his flights are factually reported under oath by witnesses from all walks of life (including popes, cardinals, ambassadors, military officials, doctors, royalty and nobility); and that many of these levitations were, despite their sudden onset, sufficiently prolonged to allow the often multiple witnesses present to overcome their initial incredulity with time to make careful and close-up observations.

Joseph’s simple vertical elevations before altars or crucifixes sometimes blossomed into extended horizontal trajectories through the air. One Easter, at the monastery of Fossombrone, Joseph was enraptured by the sight of a lamb. One of the friars with him put it into the saint’s arms, who then ran off with it on his shoulders. The party followed him and saw Joseph hurl the lamb into the sky and himself soar up after it. There, at the height of the trees, he and the lamb remained stationary for more than two hours.

Another characteristic of Joseph’s phenomena is his sheer prolificacy, which brought its own problems. In the monastery of Grotella, for example, where St Joseph spent 16 years, there are depositions recording 70 of his levitations; at which milestone, Grosso notes, “the diarist Archangelo Rosmi stopped recording new cases”. Any more, said Rosmi, “would not be worth the trouble [..] In days of fervor, Padre Giuseppe might leave his senses several times. During a single mass one could verify three or four cases of levitation. It would be impossible to narrate one by one the mystical manifestations.” There is insight here, too, into the phenomena that accompanied his ecstasies. Like St Teresa, he struggled against them but, unlike her, he more often gave himself up to them, regretting only that they interfered with his priestly tasks. The puritanical guilt came later; these too delicious “tastes of the true glory of paradise” were an “an evil that he suffered”, especially the “shame and embarassment” he felt when aware he was being watched. There is a hint here of explanation for Joseph’s unique changes of direction during his flights, forward and backwards, level and swooping. He likened himself to a small bird, flying here and there as it tried to escape, or perhaps, to get closer to the “beloved object”.

Such ‘antics’ could hardly fail to have attracted attention, much to the dismay and often suspicion of his superiors. Joseph was even sent to the Inquisition several times to answer accusations of heresy, possession, being a magician or in error theologically; examinations which this uneducated and simple yet devout mystic endured with a humility which left his superiors baffled and with no alternative but to move him between monasteries and convents when they felt that his fame (or notoriety) was detrimental to the local peace and order, or in danger of fomenting an unauthorised cult.

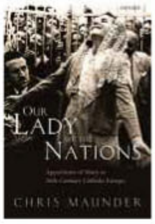
> “The party followed him and saw Joseph hurl the lamb into the sky and himself soar after it”

Grosso begins with an important contribution to the hagiographic literature, having commissioned and included here the first English translation of the biography of St Joseph, compiled from the earliest records of eye-witness testimony by Domenico Bernini, son of the famous Baroque sculptor and architect. Bernini senior’s sculptures often movingly depict the intense psychological states of his subjects; one of the most famous being his Ecstasy of St Teresa (1651), herself another of Leroy’s authenticated levitants. Along the way, Grosso attempts an up-to-date assessment of various theories of levitation, making an excellent discussion of what the pioneering scientist Sir William Crookes – president of both the Royal Society and the Society for Psychical Research – called “a new force”. Where Crookes attempted to account for much of the physical phenomena of spiritualism, Grosso, in his final chapter, explores his own extension of Crookes’ notions,

Continued on page 56

Contemporary visions

Marian apparitions have to be seen in a political context and cast light on the state of the society from which they emerge



Our Lady of the Nations

Apparitions of Mary in 20th-Century Catholic Europe

Chris Maunder

Oxford University Press
Hb, 240pp, illus, bib, ind, £25.00, ISBN 9780198718383
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £21.00

'Mother Mary come to me...' sang the Beatles, 'let it be.' And so it has been across Europe for the last century and a half. Numerous reports of apparitions of the Virgin Mary have come from across the modern, increasingly secular and often war-torn continent.

Some of the places associated with claims of sightings of Mary have become internationally famous pilgrimage sites. Fatima, Lourdes and Medjugorje continue to attract thousands of visitors long after the initial events. Their reputations have spread thanks to the developments in communication from rail travel to the Internet. Other sites have enjoyed a short-lived burst of fame, such as Ballinspittle and the other Irish apparition sites of 1985, only to be relegated to an historical footnote.

Chris Maunder has had a 35-year interest in Marian apparitions in modern Europe. *Our Lady of the Nations* is a comprehensive overview of a subject which to the secular world is regarded with curious and doubting amusement, but which to devotees of the various apparition cults can be at the centre of their religious devotions. Often 'Our Lady' brings, through the seers, messages to the world in the form of overt warnings of punishment ahead; 'a tribulation and chastisement,' says Irish mystic and stigmatic Christina Gallagher. Sometimes messages have been more mysterious, few more so than the three secrets of Fatima, which many Catholics still believe have not been fully revealed by the Vatican. The six visionaries who commune with the Virgin Mary on the Hill of Apparitions at Medjugorje too have hinted at 10 secret messages that have been vouchsafed to them.

Visionaries have, typically, been unsophisticated observers and often children. The Portuguese cousins who first witnessed the appearance of Mary in Fatima in 1917 were aged seven, eight and 10. Sixty years earlier at Lourdes in France it was the 14-year-old Bernadette who spoke to a lady in a cave whom she met when gathering firewood.

The book examines the factors common to the many accounts of sightings. It contains a tabulated breakdown of visionaries by age and gender, confirming a bias towards women and children. These are initially grassroots events. They can occur as 'epidemics' with one claim sparking another and then another within the same region. The response of the Roman Catholic Church authorities is always one of caution. Folk faith Mariology sits uncomfortably with the theology of many of the bishops and yet events that stimulate significant renewals of faith cannot be dismissed out of hand. The idea of Mary as a bringer of consolation and reassurance is encouraged, as are calls to repentance; however, the Apocalyptic messages that are said to accompany many of the visions, warnings of imminent divine judgement, are seldom directly endorsed. The church too has to consider whether events of a paranormal nature are of supernatural origin and whether they are divine or diabolic.

The visions, suggests the author, have to be seen within the wider political context. The fame of Fatima came to symbolise the restoration of a pro-Catholic government in Portugal after the First World War. The Virgin Mary appeared to console and reassure Catholics during the perilous years in Nazi Germany. The book has a whole chapter on Marian cults and the Cold War. Apparition cults, Chris Maunder notes, "express anxiety about developments that appear to be detrimental to traditional faith practices and lifestyle... The Catholic sub-communities in which apparition cults have arisen are generally those that have resisted political, social and moral change."

Yet is the social science approach sufficient to explain what many believe to be divine or supernatural phenomena? What are apparitions? The author quotes a claim that as many as one in 10 of the population has seen something which does not belong to the everyday material world. What the seer witnesses appears very real, but the seer knows it cannot be solidly of this world. Of course, few hallucinations, if that is what they are, take the form of visions of Mary. The shape an apparition takes depends on the cultural background of the observer. Visions of Mary come almost exclusively from within the Roman Catholic tradition. It is when stories of what is witnessed enter the public domain and are widely believed, that these visions become significant. That is when reports of local and subjective experiences can cast light on the state of the society in which they occur.

Ted Harrison

Fortean Times Verdict
SUCCESSFULLY PLACES MARIAN VISIONS IN A CULTURAL CONTEXT **8**

Continued from previous page

using the lastest findings and theories. At its heart, this "new science of spirits", as Grosso calls it, recognises that most (if not all) authentic psychical phenomena have their roots in shamanic-style trance states with a mystical or ecstatic component. Grosso argues that when consciousness thus becomes "transcendent", the barriers between the local and the universal; between the self and an ultimate spiritual existence; between the body, mind and collective mind; between 'here' and 'there', the now and not-now (etc), the properties of physical 'reality' can be overruled or re-written.

I commend this thought-provoking work to every fortean.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict
DETAILED AND VERY THOUGHT-PROVOKING STUDY OF LEVITATION **9**

International Space Station

Architecture Beyond Earth

David Nixon

Circa Press 2016
Hb, 416 pp, illus, £65.00, ISBN 9780993072130
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £55.00

The International Space Station is not usually thought of as an industrial construction project, but that's how David Nixon – an architect who helped design the ISS – sees it. This may be packaged like a standard coffee table book, but this isn't a book you can easily dip into. The author wants to tell a story, and to follow that story you have to read it cover to cover. In 400+ pages there are just five chapters, arranged chronologically... and only at the start of the last chapter does the action reach 1998 and the launch of the first ISS modules. The previous four chapters describe the countless design iterations the station went through during the 15 years it was just an idea on paper.

David Nixon wrote the book he wanted to write. Whether large numbers of people will want to read is another matter. I found the four-to-one history-to-actuality balance tiresome – I would have preferred it the other way round.

Furthermore, the book's emphasis on space hardware rather than space missions misses the point that, for most people, the appealing thing about manned spaceflight is the human-interest angle. Yet only a handful of ISS astronauts and cosmonauts are referred to by name. On the positive side, the book is packed with information and lavishly illustrated. At almost every turn of the page the reader is treated to a gorgeous colour photograph or an immaculate line drawing. For all but the most dedicated connoisseurs, the hefty price tag is going to put it in the "borrow from library" rather than "buy" category.

Andrew May

Fortean Times Verdict
EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT ISS DESIGN... 7

Fan Phenomena

Mermaids

Ed: Matthieu J Guitton

Intellect Books 2016
Pb, 102pp, illus, bib, $28.50/£15.50, ISBN 9781783205912
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.50

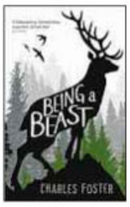
The Fan Phenomena series aims to 'decode' cult subjects – from Marilyn Monroe to *Star Trek* – via snappy essays from a range of scholars and cultural critics. The highlight for me of this brief and well designed book brings steampunk and mermaids together – an unlikely prospect unless you remember the influence of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* on early steampunk, Lovecraft's Deep Ones, or Google "steampunk mermaid" to glimpse the range of fanart, DIY projects and reinventions. Ariel from Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, who wanted to be "where the people are" is less saccharine in goggles and wielding a trident. And for those keen to pop on a tail and swim with the fishes, an instructor is available. She's working towards health and safety certification… Very modern.

William Darragh

Fortean Times Verdict
SMALL BUT JAMMED WITH NUGGETS OF MERFOLK ODDNESS 8

Badgers 'R' Us...

An attempt to reconnect with the animal kingdom that is invigorating, fascinating and as mad as a box of frogs



Being a Beast

Charles Foster

Profile Books 2016
Hb, 218pp, bib, £14.99, ISBN 9781781255346
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99

What do we know about other animals? You'd think it would be quite a lot, given the number of natural history programmes we churn out. But what do we know about *being* other animals? And, beyond the twitching and ticking of birders or the poking at rat brains of scientists, what *can* we know, and *how* can we know it?

Charles Foster, who has written some extremely fortean books on brains and genes and altruism, here suggests that the obvious answer is by becoming those animals: badger, otter, urban fox, red deer, swift.

This might strike you as quite barmy – a fool's errand if ever there was one. Or it might sound a bit like one of those predictable bits of nature writing that have proliferated recently: my year living with beavers or counting British butterflies. Don't worry: this is the former. It's barmy – quite barking, in fact – in the way that some of the greatest books about nature, from Jacquetta Hawkes's *A Land* to AJ Baker's *The Peregrine* are.

Foster makes his own badger sett in the Black Mountains and lies up underground with his eight-year-old son, emerging at night to eat earthworms and snuffle along the forest floor (the occasional arrival of a friend bearing lasagne reminds us that Thoreau's *Walden* sojourn was not a continuous or solitary one; Emerson lived nearby and could be relied on for a decent meal). He gets his 'cubs' to spraint by a Devon river and sees if they can identify whose poos are whose (it's a good job social services didn't get wind of any of this, you can't help thinking). He haunts the back gardens and parks of London's East End, scavenging leftover takeaways and alarming the local constabulary. He is hunted by bloodhounds and shivers with freezing deer. He is tugged skyward and southward by the migrations of that most wonderful of birds, the common swift.

Is this as daft as it sounds? Why would you want to be a badger? And what makes you think that you could? Leaving the first question aside, the answer to the second is self-evident to anyone who's ever looked into the eyes of another creature, human or non-human, and felt the tug of connection. The answer to the third question follows from the second: we share a physiology and a history, and are shaped by the same land: it's just a matter of dropping our eye level from six feet back down to one or two, unlearning and learning again.

Does the author succeed? Is he still Charles Foster, or is he now a badger who writes books? You'll just have to read it, and you should. It's important. Be warned, though: quite properly, there's something here to offend everyone. Neo-Darwinists will cry foul at Foster's suggestion that they're not really proper Darwinists at all; conventional biologists will be appalled by his invocation of Rupert Sheldrake's morphic fields; rationalists will snigger at his shamanistic leanings; atheists will frown at his talk of God; anthropomorphists will recoil as Mr Todd slashes their smiling faces open; effete urbanites will not appreciate his scorn for their lifestyles; cat lovers will not easily forgive him his "elemental" hatred of their feline overlords; vegetarians will squirm at the pleasure he has taken in killing other creatures in his dark, hunter's past; and bankers will just be glad they're not looking the wrong way down the barrel of Foster's shotgun.

It's an astonishing book, teeming with insights that wriggle like maggots in a dead mouse (metaphor is a bit of a theme, you'll find). If you spend much, or any, of your time out of doors, little shocks of recognition leap off every page. It's an exciting, infuriating, contrary, contradictory, clinical, magical, hilarious, horrible, self-loathing, inspiring and exhausting bit of work, as moody as the British weather, and often, indeed, at its mercy: sunny, exultant, flat, raging, despairing. You may find yourself throwing it across the room in disgust. But if you're game, it might take you with it, undermining your certainties, reconnecting you to the world, opening your eyes and ears – and more especially your nose – to a wider and wilder world.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
PROVOCATIVE ATTEMPT TO GRAPPLE WITH THE NON-HUMAN 9

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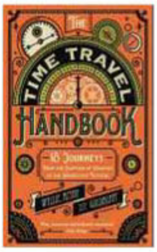
Time tripping

A steampunk-styled travel guide delivers some proper history along the way



The Time Travel Handbook

James Wylie, Johnny Acton and David Goldblatt

Profile Books 2015
Hb, 324pp, £12.99, illus, bib, ISBN 9781781254042
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £10.99

Presented as a Baedeker for time-travellers, this is essentially a steampunk-styled history book. Assuming the slightly superior avuncular tones of the classic travel guide, the authors take you on a whirlwind tour of 18 eclectically chosen moments in history that might be worth turning up at, from Henry VIII at The Field of the Cloth of Gold, to Woodstock and the Peasants' Revolt. Complete with carefully chosen drop-off and rendezvous points, rules relating to languages to be spoken, clothing, interactions with the locals and strictures against souvenir-taking, they create a plausible instruction book for would-be Doctor Whos.

Structured round itineraries for their chosen events, briefing notes on the background context and pointers to features or incidents of interest, the book overcomes the risk of being a tacky form-over-content cash-in through meticulous research and excellent writing. You get the sense that the depictions here are as accurate as they can feasibly be, and have a good stab at capturing the true atmosphere of the occasion, particularly the weather. History does not usually give you the impression that the Field of the Cloth of Gold was a substantial wash-out due to it tipping down on several of its days, or that Charles I's execution coincided with one of the last days on which the Thames froze over; however, both were the case. It is better known that it rained at the Woodstock Festival, but not perhaps how much and how badly it affected proceedings. Indeed, the account of the festival here goes for graphic realism. It is clear that it was a sodden shambles rather than the sun-kissed love-in of popular imagination; and it's worth catching the Grateful Dead's acid-and-electricity-challenged set and Creedence Clearwater Revival's "storming" one, as neither will be included in the eventual film.

The accounts here are at their best when it is possible to give accurate detail, such as telling travellers to watch out for the guy at Woodstock who spent the entire festival wandering about carrying a lamb, or alerting them that the brown acid problem was overstated, but that the mescaline there was pretty rough. Less absorbing are the events where most of the available historic information is widely known, like the end of Pompeii, or descriptions of the longer expeditions, such as Captain Cook's voyages, which have to sacrifice detail to be able to cover the full period of the events, but they remain entertaining.

What could have been a rather slight book turns out to be something of a triumph – the authors have taken their mission of communicating history seriously and not allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by the conceit, while at the same time managing to stay true to this initial idea. A perfect present for an imaginative niece or nephew.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

BUDDING DOCTORS WILL ENJOY THIS TIMEY-WIMEY TRAVELOGUE 8

The Historical Jesus Found

Barry Page

CreateSpace 2015
Pb, 212pp, £13.58, maps, illus, ISBN 9781511663557
AVAILABLE VIA AMAZON

Amongst the reasons reviewers usually avoid self-published books are the lack of a commissioning editor, copy editor and proof reader – or, in two words, quality control.

The essence of *The Historical Jesus Found* is that we can discount everything we've been taught about the life of Jesus, because newly discovered genealogies show that he had three (or perhaps four) wives and 10 (or perhaps 12) children. The first two wives, polygamously, were Mary Magdalene, by whom he had twins Judah and Joseph, Ruth and John Mattinus; and Mary of Bethany, who bore him Sarah Miriam Tamar (who married Paul), Joses the Just and Jacob. Then after surviving the crucifixion Jesus went off with his mother to Kashmir where he married again, perhaps twice, with several more offspring.

Barry Page's book is based largely on other people's (equally unsound) books about sacred lineages including Laurence Gardner's *Bloodline of the Holy Grail* and Hugh Montgomery's *The God-Kings of Europe*.

The main problem is that the author hasn't grasped the concept of supporting his statements with evidence, or of sourcing his claims or even many of his quotations; the book is simply assertion after assertion, all based on four supposed lineages of Jesus.

These are said to be found in the *Historia Certaminis Apostolici* (which the author mis-spells), supposedly written by Abdius c.AD 170 but long known by scholars to be a very much later work; the Desposyni genealogy (AD 318), apparently illegally photographed by a dodgy researcher who sneaked into "the high security section of the Vatican secret library"; the Nazarene scroll (c.AD 70), suppressed by the Dead Sea Scrolls committee but luckily copied and saved for posterity, or at least for Page, by its translator; and a document from one of the "40 Templar boxes" supposedly prepared by Jacques de Molay before the arrest of the Knights Templar. We're not told where we, or real scholars, can access these sources.

Even if these are all actual historical documents (and absolutely no evidence is presented), their existence wouldn't prove the veracity of their content, any more than the many apocryphal gospels are necessarily true accounts. If there was even the slightest possibility of anything at all factual in them, they would have been leapt upon by New Testament scholars – many of whom aren't believing Christians, so wouldn't be at all bothered by Jesus being married and having children. The fact they they haven't been is eloquent in itself – though to alternative "historians" it would simply be more proof of either the conspiracy of scholars to suppress the truth or their stupidity in failing to see what is so clear to the (entirely unqualified) author. (Either or both of these would also presumably apply to dismissive reviewers...)

Page relates a story of the descendants of Jesus turning up to see Pope Sylvester I in AD 318. "Pope Sylvester told the offspring of Jesus that 'Jesus preached the wrong religion' and showed them the way out." A nice story – but completely unsourced, yet stated as fact.

There are typos, mis-spellings and grammatical errors on almost every page, which hardly inspire confidence in the content. The author doesn't understand the use of apostrophes, using "it's" for possession, and he clearly did a blanket search-and-replace at some point, leading to numerous sentences like "Our search for the historical Jesus... reached it is climax..."

And of course he delights in telling us that "mainstream biblical scholars... the whole bible scholarship academic establishment", are wrong, and he is right. Nuff said.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

UNSCHOLARLY REHASH OF PREVIOUS ALT HISTORIES OF JESUS 2

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

Infinite Awareness

Marjorie Hines Woollacott

Roman and Littlefield 2015

Hb, 285pp, notes, bib, ind, $38.00, ISBN 9781442250338

Woollacott – a veteran professor of neuroscience at the University of Oregon – tells how, when the Dalai Lama was invited to address the world's largest gathering of neuroscientists in Washington DC in 2005, more than 600 of them – "whose view is that the sum of existence is the material world" – petitioned against his presence in the belief that, as one put it: "No opportunity should be given to anybody to use neuroscience for supporting transcendent views of the world". Later, after she had taken up meditation and experienced unexpected and intense enhancements to her consciousness, she realised how little the current theories of neurological science, which tell us much about the brain, actually tell us so little about the origin and nature of consciousness.

This intelligent account of her personal search for answers to such riddles as mystical experiences, near-death experiences, and recollections of 'past' lives, is also a highly readable medical discussion about such matters in the light of recent thinking about the brain-mind problem.

Even if you don't agree with her conclusion that, sometime in the future, "consciousness will be accepted as a primary phenomenon from which everything else springs into being", it is edifying to see the steps by which an educated and curious mind probes cautiously beyond the limitations of materialistic reductionism.

Synchronicity

Chris Mackey

Watkins 2015

Pb, 272pp, notes, bib, £9.99, ISBN 9781780287959

Apparently, there is a "brain science of synchronicity" and Mackey – an Australian psychologist – would use it to guide us to "go within and tap our intuitive minds and spiritual selves". His exposition is fluid and clear and there is an abundance of referenced cases and items ... but a discerning reader might raise an eyebrow at the frequency with which the word 'synchronicity' is used, seemingly in different contexts and with different implications. Don't let this put you off; it's a fair discussion about 'meaningful coincidences' and associated mental states, summarising a good selection of historical and contemporary material, much of it unfamiliar.

Gnostic Mysteries of Sex

Tobias Churton

Inner Traditions 2015

Pb, 310pp, notes, bib, ind, $19.95, ISBN 97811620554210

Churton – arguably one of the world's most erudite heresiologists and scholar of gnosticism – opens this study by denying it is just another New Age sex manual. His exposition begins with establishing the identity of the mysterious Barbelo, the 'lascivious' lady of Wisdom, also called Prunikos or Sophia, an anthropic expression of the feminine aspects of God and Jesus who, in the Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi, is held to be a condensation out of the First Principle, whose separation (or Fall) in some way precipitated the material world.

From the Gospel of Judas – in which Judas identifies Jesus as "from the immortal realm of Barbelo" – Churton follows a secret Christian tradition (illustrated by the works of Simon Magus, mediæval troubadors, Andrew Marvel and William Blake etc) which parallels eastern Tantra in its distinctive blend of eroticism and mysticism.

Freed of misguided religious guilt, sex becomes a symbolic component in the "high magic" of spiritual transformation. It culminates in a deconstruction of the "free-love" movements of the Western world in the 1960s.

Shape-Shifters

Michael Berman

Mandrake 2015

Pb, 191pp, illus, refs, ind, £10.99, ISBN 9781906958664

Berman selects and re-tells 18 stories of bodily transformations from diverse mythologies and cultures; some voluntary (achieved by longing or will), some involuntary (compelled by curse or fate), using magic words or potions, or the changes of the Moon, and so on.

His annotations and interventions are sparse but add critical understanding, sources and literary references.

The Transformations of Magic

Frank Klaassen

Pennsylvania State University Press 2013

Hb, 280pp, notes, bib, ind, $72.95, ISBN 9780271056265

While the witch, as an historical character, probably has the higher percentage of scholarly studies, the wizard is not far behind. More significantly, it is the wizard's employment of and relationship with 'forbidden' books and illicitly learned magic – on which Klaassen focuses here – which distinguish the wizard from the witch in the later Middle Ages up to the Renaissance, at which point the learned wizard, with his library of grimoires and alchemical laboratory, begins to evolve into an early form of scientist.

The changes and innovations, says Klaassen, "took place each time a medieval author, scribe, or collector set out to understand and practise learned magic, and then to copy the associated texts or write new ones." This lineage includes the likes of Albertus Magnus, Agrippa von Nettesheim, and John Dee (and epitomised as Shakespeare's Prospero), and passes through the critical centuries that saw a decline in the more scholarly astrology-based magic (which sought to channel the power of stars and planets) against a rise in ritual magic (primarily to converse with demons and angels). As Klaassen notes, "in the rich and turbid waters where Jewish, Greek, Arabic and other ancient literature flowed together", one of its more peculiar branches was necromancy.

This is a detailed and heavily footnoted study for which Klaassen spent years among stacks and surviving manuscripts, but it is a triumph of scholarship; not for everyone, but valuable nevertheless.

The Laws of Medicine

Siddhartha Mukherjee

Simon & Schuster 2015

HB, 70pp, £7.99, ISBN 9781471141850

This short book – associated with a TED lecture – is Mukherjee's account of the rules of medicine he learned while training as a surgeon and which he extrapolates into philosophical stances applicable to life and learning in general. As a doctor and surgeon, he has to make difficult decisions in challenging situations where the given information cannot always be relied upon as correct; hence 'rule 1': "A strong intuition is much more powerful than a weak test." His portraits of the tutors and patients who provided him with his 'eureka moments' are hugely enjoyable as well as informative, making this a refreshing glimpse into an unfamiliar aspect of the medical profession.

St Andrew's Untold Stories

Leonard Low

Steve Savage publishers 2015

Pb, 192pp, refs, £9.95, ISBN 9781904246442

Low – born and bred in the Scottish county of Fife – turns the spotlight of his third book of Fife lore on the town of St Andrews and its environs. The tale of how the bones of St Andrew, Jesus's first disciple, came to be shipwrecked on this Scottish coast is followed by 16 chapters of murder and witchcraft and other foul and astonishing doings; much of the material translated by Low from 17th and 18th century books in Old Gaelic in his own library.

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FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.

Green Room

Dir Jeremy Saulnier, USA 2015

On UK release from 13 May

The Ain't Rights are a struggling hardcore punk band who spend their time driving up and down the West Coast (by which I mean California to Oregon, not Clovelly to Morecambe), siphoning petrol when they run out of gas and occasionally falling asleep at the wheel. When a gig falls through, they take up a hastily arranged alternative booking and find themselves playing a bar in the middle of nowhere run by Nazi skinheads. Bravely opening their set with a certain Dead Kennedys cover, they get on and get off as quickly as possible. Just as they are about to leave, the band members accidentally witness a murder and barricade themselves in the bar's green room for safety. From that moment on, it's a brutal battle for survival as they try to get out alive.

It's a classic set-up, then, and one that has been used countless times in cinema, in genres as diverse as horror, thrillers and Westerns. This film falls somewhere between the first two of these, but could more accurately be described as a terror film: it creates a knot in the pit of your stomach, a feeling of panic and helplessness, which never goes away.

Green Room delivers such an intense experience that few other films match up: *Deliverance*, perhaps; *Reservoir Dogs*, maybe; the first 20 minutes of *Saving Private Ryan*, possibly. It is very graphic, very bloody and pulls off several very shocking scenes. The room full of hacks, me included, couldn't suppress a few stunned gasps at various points. Only when it ends do you realise you're quivering in your seat. However, it isn't ever gloatingly sadistic in the manner of a lot of modern movies. The violence is quick, brutal and often instantly lethal. You genuinely feel that death for these characters is only moments away.

If Nazi skinheads are to become the new go-to baddies for films such as this then a) so much the better, and b) they make for terrifying foes. They are so vile, almost inhuman, that you wish that Fred Williamson and Jim Brown would appear over the horizon, armed to the teeth. There is no attempt whatsoever to deal with the motivations of these people – and indeed race and politics never come into it – so if you're looking for an *American History X* type message, you won't find it here.

What you will find, though, is a brilliantly made film: a masterpiece of editing, tone, pace and atmosphere. Not much acting is possible – it never is when characters are wielding machetes and box cutters – but stars Imogen Poots and Anton Yelchin stand out amid the carnage and Patrick Stewart, a long way from the Royal Shakespeare Company, manages a fine Ben Kingsley in *Sexy Beast* turn. It's not always completely coherent, plot-wise, but that's a minor quibble.

It's difficult to say much more without blunting some of the film's power, and it would be a crime to do that with a movie this good. So don't read too much about it – just go and see it! But be warned: it's heavy.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict

OF ITS TYPE, THIS IS AN INSTANT CLASSIC **9**

Kill Command

Dir Steven Gomez, UK 2015

On UK release and Sky Store from 13 May

It's robots gone wild in the forest in director Steven Gomez's military SF actioner *Kill Command*. Set in a near future where cybernetic technology dominates human life almost as completely as Facebook and Twitter do now, a unit of elite soldiers is choppered into a remote government island facility for just another onerous training exercise against dumb bots which are supposedly at the cutting edge of military technology – but it soon turns into a fight for survival when technology far more lethal and sophisticated is revealed to be lurking within the trees.

First-time director Gomez was responsible for the FX on Gareth Edwards's *Monsters* and the assimilation of a CGI stalker into the film's damp, misty forest milieu puts other efforts with 10 times the budget to shame. The big boss robot itself is reminiscent of a towering fight bot in *Real Steel*, only with all the nasty accoutrements of the metal contestants on an episode of *Robot Wars*. "Don't let it cut me up!" one of the hard-arse soldiers cries out, finding himself at the mercy of the malignant military metal as it brandishes a blow-torch attachment in his face.

After a slick narrative set-up, the film settles deftly into a series of escalating firefights between man and robot, culminating in a last stand fought out on a training ground consisting of bombed out buildings and exposed ground, with crash test dummies strewn among the real corpses.

Vanessa Kirby's Mills, a cybernetically enhanced tech specialist, is the film's calm and calculating focal point. Brought along by her paymasters to observe the proceedings, she becomes increasingly twitchy as the technological enhancements she can wire into and control cease to cooperate. She's already distrusted by the grunts as being more cyborg than human, and now they become convinced that she knows something they don't. In fact, Mills gradually realises she knows less than she thought she did.

Kill Command unmistakeably inhabits the familiar military-SF subgenre, but what lifts it above the realm of cliché is Gomez's slick and superior execution of familiar tropes. He's not afraid to frame iconic moments from the recent past; at one point there is an unmistakable, frame-by-frame nod to Arnie's T-800, and if you listen closely you'll hear what amounts to Predator's glottal clicking within the forest ambiance. *Predator*, *Terminator*, *Aliens*, *Southern Comfort*, *Dog Soldiers* –they're all lurking in the forest... along with a bloody big killer robot.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict

INTENSE AND FUN PREDATOR AND TERMINATOR MASH-UP **7**

Evolution

Dir Lucille Hadzihalilovic, Belgium/France/Spain 2015

On UK release from 6 May

Nicolas (Max Bernard) is a young boy who lives with his mother (Julie-Marie Parmentier) in a plain house in a small village by the coast. So far so good. Only there are no adult males, or young females for that matter; just single mothers, each with a young son. The boys' lives are highly regimented: they are all fed the same revolting-looking food, are given the same black medicine for the same, unspecified, condition, and all attend the same disturbing hospital.

One day, while swimming, Nicolas sees the body of a young boy half buried in the sea bed. When he tells his mother, she is alarmed but insists he is imagining things. A bright and curious lad, Nicolas starts to believe he's not being told the truth about – well, about anything – and resolves to discover it for himself, a quest in which he is aided by a sympathetic nurse (Roxane Duran).

Writer-director Hadzihalilovic has constructed a film which defies easy categorisation, let alone description. The imagery suggests a horror film of the tentacled variety; the sequences set in the hospital are particularly disturbing and approach Cronenberg levels of revolting body horror. The structure too points in that direction: we follow Nicolas on an increasingly perilous investigation of a dark mystery which threatens to build to a terrible outcome.

But at the same time the film also explores the bond between a child and its mother and the processes of pregnancy and birth. As such, there is a great deal of imagery based on the natural world; the underwater photography is some of the most beautiful I have seen outside of a documentary. The reverence for, and fascination with, nature recalls the best of Terrence Malick's films.

Hadzihalilovic depicts all this with the kind of static elegance that makes Kubrick look like Michael Bay. As far as I could tell, the camera never moves, except in the underwater scenes. What this means is that, firstly, she has the opportunity to present meticulously constructed compositions within the frame and set them up

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth **REVEREND PETER LAWS** dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

BRIDE OF REANIMATOR

Dir Brian Yuzna, US 1990

Arrow Video, £17.99 (Dual format)

BASKET CASE TRILOGY

Dir Frank Henenlotter, US 1982-91

Second Sight, £24.99 (Blu-ray)

Rubber! Latex! KY Jelly! No, this isn't my weekend shopping list, rather the the key ingredients for this month's horror crop, which sprouts from that halcyon era known as 'pre-CGI'.

Arrow Video have released *Bride of Re-Animator*, which finds Dr Herbert West bored with bringing standard cadavers back to life. Now, he embarks on a series of wild experiments: fusing limbs to heads, fingers to an eyeball and, in his most ambitious project yet, creates an entire female, with Def Leppard hair and gaping, unfinished surgical wounds.

While it is a lot of fun, the film is far from perfect – it ends too abruptly, and the malevolent severed head of Dr Hill is underused (though he does get bat wings grafted onto him: a bizarre yet logical solution to his mobility problems). On the whole though, *Bride* is actually better than I remembered it, and its embrace of classic gothic imagery is part of what makes it so enjoyable. West lives in a funeral home, and his lab is filled with bubbling vials and smoking test tubes. Even his guilt-ridden assistant Dan wears a baggy, Victorian style, swashbuckler shirt. Yet these nods to traditional horror are bound up with a thoroughly 1980s sensibility – i.e. the love of excess. I interviewed director Brian Yuzna a few months back and what struck me was his giddy delight in seeing the human body go through the weirdest transformations. At one point in this film, a character accuses West of "morbid doodling with body parts". In some ways, that could stand as an excellent description of Yuzna's career. Which isn't intended as a criticism, incidentally.

Second Sight are also doing their bit for latex, with an HD release of Frank Henenlotter's legendary *Basket Case* trilogy. Even as a kid, I could tell that the 1982 original wasn't just a horror film: it was a *cool* horror film, edgy and fresh.

It's the saga of conjoined twin brothers, attached to one another since birth and now grown up. One appears 'normal', while the other is a fleshy growth with a face. They're called Duane and Belial… no prize for guessing which might be which. The first film shows Duane moving into a sleazy New York apartment, carrying his brother in a basket. They try their best to live a normal life, but people tend to scream in horror at the 'monster' brother. No wonder Belial gets a complex and starts ripping people's faces off.

It's a fascinating movie. Pure exploitation, yes, but I bet it'd work just as well as a quirky, dark, literary novel.

Basket Case 2 (1990) is also kind of brilliant. The brothers get taken in by kindly Granny Ruth, who runs a secretive but idyllic hostel for the extremely deformed. Here, Belial fits in perfectly, and now it's Duane who feels like the 'freak'. Yes, the film might have pure shlock moments – like when Belial meets another fleshy lump and they have full-on sex – but it (as, to an extent, does Yuzna's) almost seems to say: if you find this repellent, then maybe you're the one with the problem. You just can't handle anybody that looks different, because the word 'freak' really is relative.

In short, if you let them, this month's selections can be powerful, subversive parables… straight from the rubber workshop of filthy creation.

Fortean Times Verdict

CLASSIC SCHLOCKFESTS FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF LATEX **7**

for us to admire. And admire them I did; she has a painter's eye, and much of the film, despite its subject matter, is achingly beautiful.

Secondly, and this is more problematic, the static camera means the viewer is given no choice as to what he or she can look at; and, frankly, there's not a huge amount going on. The upshot of this is that whatever point the director is trying to make, assuming there is one, remains obscure. I'm all for letting the audience work it out for themselves but for that to happen they need more to go on than Hadzihalilovic provides here. The film could be a feminist parable about the status of women as baby-making machines in a patriarchal society; it could be an examination of the painful evolutionary process in which one life form gradually becomes another. It might even be a spiritual journey to Heaven (or indeed Hell).

However, a film that is difficult to interpret should be welcomed in our franchise-dominated cinemas. The director has created a visual feast sustained by an intriguing narrative that obliges you to ponder the meaning of what you've been watching. By all means go and see the next Marvel or DC offerings, but find time for *Evolution* too: that way, you'll have experienced another aspect of what makes cinema, and art, so wonderful.
Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict
NOT AN EASY WATCH, BUT A REWARDING ONE... 7

Robinson Crusoe on Mars

Dir Byron Haskin, US 1964
Eureka Entertainment Ltd, £17.99 (Dual format)

An astronaut is stranded on Mars (or Earth stand-in, Death Valley) with little hope of rescue and has to use his wits and whatever resources are available to him to survive. Sound familiar? However, it's not 2015's big hit *The Martian*, but 1964's less well remembered *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*. This movie is exactly what its title suggests it might be: a transposition of the main plot points of Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel to the optimistic space age of the 1960s. Instead of Matt Damon, Paul Mantee's Kit Draper is the stranded spaceman, with television's Batman, Adam West, as his short-lived sidekick. Forced to abandon their ship due to an imminent collision with an asteroid, the pair escape in lifepods, but West's character doesn't make it, leaving Mantee alone as the first man on Mars.

His struggle for survival plays out like a first draft of *The Martian*, with the planet's limited resources cleverly turned to his advantage. There's the task of finding water, food and shelter – the first requirements for survival. As in the source novel, however, Mantee's pioneering human is not alone after all. First there's Mona the space monkey, then his very own 'Martian Friday' (Victor Lundin), a runaway slave who has escaped the clutches of the alien miners exploiting the Red Planet.

Matt Damon didn't have to contend with monkeys, aliens, or oxygen pills. Where *The Martian* (and Andy Weir's source novel) sticks to the high concept idea of a man alone on Mars, Byron Haskin's film can't resist adding space opera 'adventure' to the basic idea, throwing in aliens. There's also the problem that while the movie looks great (restored Technicolor for this Blu-ray release), for much of the running time it is actually quite slow and (whisper it) fairly boring. There is none of the sparkle that Damon's wry castaway exhibited in his video diaries and communications with Earth: Mantee has none of these things, leaving him with just a monkey in a diaper to chat to until his Martian Friday appears. The 1964 original also sticks to actual science, as far as it was known at the time, but then (like *The Martian*'s initial implausible sandstorm) gives in to the unsound and unscientific in the interest of creating drama.

Like the Red Planet's surface, *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* is a rather dry affair, despite the half-hearted addition of an alien threat towards the end (the plan was for several Martian monsters, before they were ditched in the interests of 'plausibility'). Haskins had enjoyed more success a decade before with 1953's spectacular Earth invasion in *The War of the Worlds*, but *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* fails to capture that film's colourful imaginative approach to SF.
Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict
LOOKS GREAT, BUT ULTIMATELY UNENGAGING 6

SHORTS

THE MONOLITH MONSTERS

Screenbound Pictures, £7.99 (DVD)

When a meteor crashes into the desert, it leaves odd black fragments scattered by a nearby town. Evidence of an invasion? Not really, but everybody still might die. That's what's so nifty about this late 1950s sci-fi thriller. There's no malevolent aliens, no men in rubber suits: the disaster here is purely geological. When the meteor fragments come into contact with water, they grow to skyscraper size and start falling. What's more, there's a rainstorm coming. A refreshing entry into science-might-kill-us-but-let's-use-science-to save-us genre. **Rev Peter Laws** 7/10

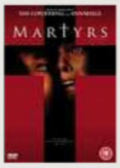
MONSTER ON CAMPUS

Screenbound Pictures, £7.99 (DVD)

Wow, this one is hokey, but in a really good way. A college professor is studying a recently discovered prehistoric fish, but then he accidentally cuts his hand and gets ancient fish juice in his bloodstream. Naturally, he quickly regresses into a brutish, barely evolved ape. There's lots of pontificating on the nature of life, as well as our hero stomping hairily towards young ladies who scream into their forearms. I love the way the professor retains at least some civility: even when he's a marauding beast, he remembers to tuck his checked shirt in. What a fella. There's a giant insect in it too, which is always a nice bonus. **Rev PL** 6/10

MARTYRS

Altitude Film Distribution, £9.99 (DVD)



It's doubtful that Pascal Laugier's 2008 arthouse-horror offering (often cited as an example of the 'New French Extremity' movement) needed an American remake, and inevitable that any such undertaking would struggle to get out from under the original's daunting, bloody shadow. And such, indeed, is the case. Laugier's film harnessed its genuinely extreme vision of relentless torture in the name of transcendence to a rigorous command of film language and superb cinematography, as well as fielding two fine central performances. This follow the original's outline closely at first before diverging at the midpoint in the interests of making a conventional horror movie complete with 'suspenseful' chase scenes. If you have seen the original, then this is completely redundant: a film that pulls every one of its punches. **David Sutton** 4/10

THE HALLOW

Entertainment One, £9.99 (DVD)

Writer/director Corin Hardy's *The Hallow*, in which a young couple move to rural Ireland and face not just hostile locals but little people lurking in the woods, is an ambitious attempt to evoke Machen-esque terrors, fusing several generic strands – folk horror, body horror, creature feature and eco-sub-text – into a cohesive whole. It almost works. There are some genuinely scary sequences and inventive physical effects, but for every original idea there's an equally predictable lapse into groan-inducing genre cliché. **David Sutton** 5/10

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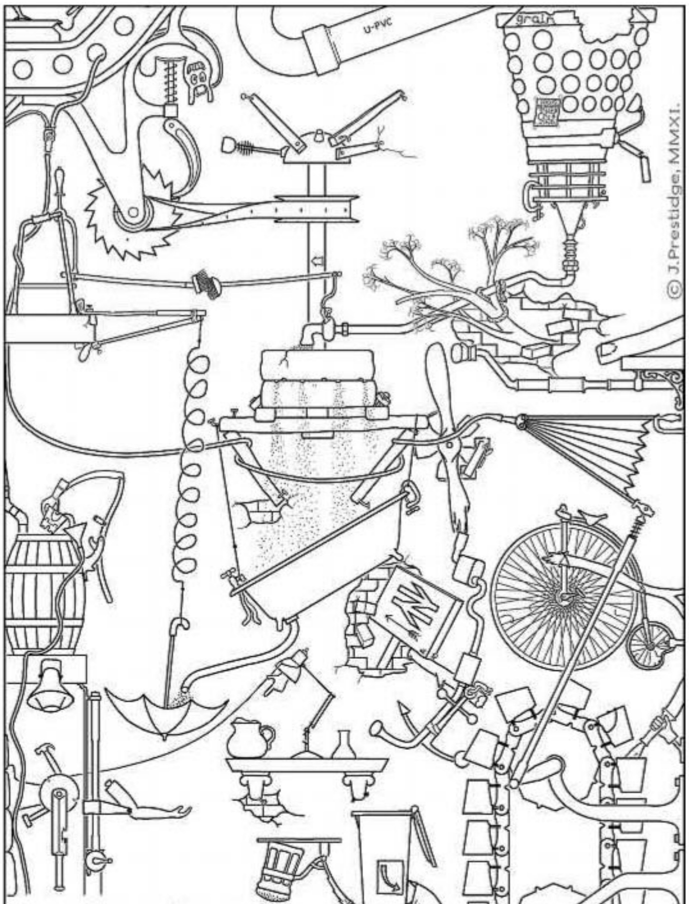

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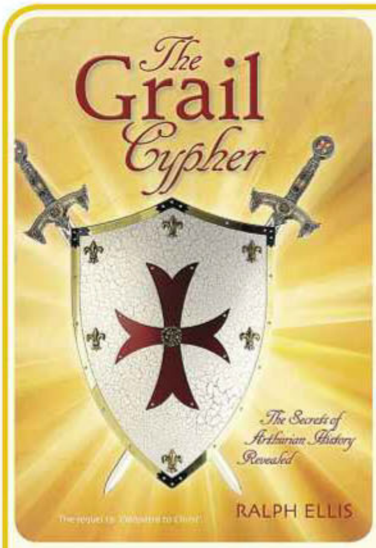
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Dear FT...

letters

Never officially flat

FT has perpetuated the myth that the mediæval Church believed in a flat Earth [**FT338:21**]. The theory of Cosmas Indicopleustes was not "welcomed by the Church" because the Church did not know about it. Cosmas was an obscure author whose work survives in only three manuscripts and was not translated into Latin until 1706. Every educated person in the Middle Ages (including Doctors of the Church such as Bede and Aquinas) believed that the Earth was round. (Bede actually discusses whether the Earth is a perfect sphere.) As shown by JB Russell in his book *Inventing the Flat Earth*, the myth was actually created in the late 19th century by secularist authors in an attempt to discredit the Church and to present it as always having been – and continuing to be – anti-scientific.

Martin Jenkins
London

Your report (following the *Washington Post*) refers to *Christine Garwood's History of Flat Earthism*. This is Christine Garwood's excellent *Flat Earth – The History of an Infamous Idea* (Thomas Dunne Books, 2007).

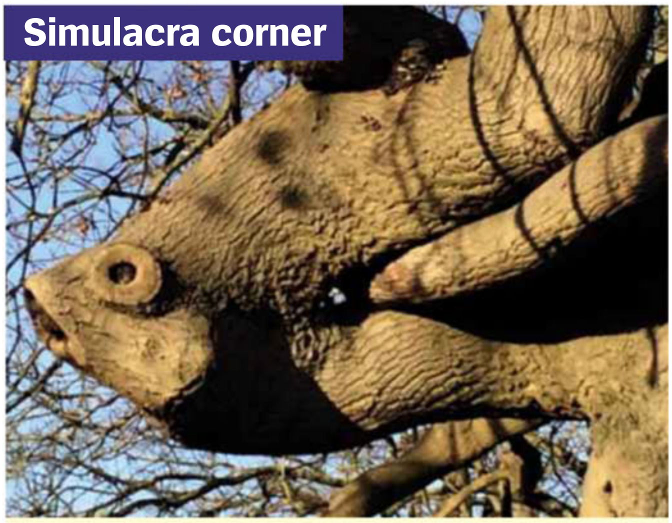
Peter Olausson
Gothenburg, Sweden

Local Ghosts

Regarding local ghost history [**FT337:18**], I can fully support researching local spectral activity as a sure way of walking just a few steps and mingling with the Other World. For example, where I live in Watford, Hertfordshire, I regularly begin at the old free school on the High Street, which is reputed to be haunted by 'Keith Cook', a Victorian schoolmaster who died saving the children from a fire on the site. From there it's a two-minute walk to the Palace Theatre, which has two spectres, one of which is a follow spot operator and the other a former usherette who vanishes on site. The Watford Library further along the road is allegedly haunted by a male librarian from the 1930s who disapproves of female librarians; and finally in Cassiobury Park the headless ghost of Arthur, 1st Baron Capell of Hadham (1608-49), has been sighted for many years. Capell was a Royalist who was captured and beheaded. The duration of this local ghost walk is less than 15 minutes.

GER Ford
Watford, Hertfordshire

Simulacra corner



This fish in a tree was photographed by James Twitchett. *We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.*

Blessed Yetis

I was fortunate to attend an audience with Brian Blessed yesterday (19 March 2016) afternoon. After regaling us with tales of *Flash Gordon* and how Sam Jones looks heroic from every angle, he spoke about his time in the east, and touched on a fortean topic. He claims that there is a mass migration of yetis across Mongolia from east to west and vice versa, i.e. they move for the winter. He says this is not thought of as unusual by the Mongolian people, and that the yetis have lupine companions in the same way that humans have canine companions. I wonder if any readers have experience of Mongolia and might be able to shed more light on this fascinating idea.

- In response to Pam Thornton's letter [**FT336:71**], ceiling corners are where ladybirds tend to hibernate. See *www.facebook.com/BBCSpringwatch/posts/995855227174652*

John Wilding
By email

Urban legend nailed

On 24 January the *Liverpool Echo* wrote a story (www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/alarming-facebook-posts-show-kittens-10781769) on kittens and dog fighting. This reported that Facebook pages of some women in Liverpool were advertising kittens for sale to be used as bait in dogfights. It was accompanied by a photo of an Alsatian with a kitten's head in its mouth. The paper contacted us [the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] and asked for a comment. We said we would investigate. On 26 January the story was picked up by the *Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror, Metro*, and *Newsweek*. On 27 January further copycat articles appeared in the *Daily Express* and *Daily Telegraph*. It has gone round the world on Twitter and social media.

We have investigated this and it is a hoax. The photo is a standard Google photo from 2013 unconnected with dog fighting. Several women are indeed selling kittens but are likewise unconnected with dog fighting. Their Facebook site was hacked and a posting made of this to get to the women. So where does this leave us?

Gossip had already gone round the world before the facts got out of bed. Whilst some newspapers, such as the *Independent*, are now reporting it correctly, I will not be surprised to see it repeated in the future and become as much an urban legend as bonsai kittens (http://ding.net/bonsaikitten/), a story started by students in 2000 and revealed as a hoax in 2001 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonsai_Kitten), but about which we continued to get calls well into the 2010s. It is rare when you can pinpoint the origin of an urban legend, but this is one of those instances.

David Bowles
Assistant Director, Public Affairs, RSPCA, Southwater, West Sussex

Singing genes

The report on the use of bird language on La Gomera and in Turkey [**FT338:10**] reminded me of a fairly recent article in *New Scientist* (vol.224, no.3000/3001 20/27 Dec 2014, p.13) which suggested that we share genes for singing with some birds. The scientists involved studied "maps of gene expression" in the brain tissues of birds that can learn vocals, those that can't, and us. They found 55 genes that work in a similar way in the singing birds and ourselves. None was found with other animals, though I doubt if they tested them all.

Mike Haigh
Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire

letters

Pond slime?

Does anyone remember a very odd story from the Brighton *Argus*? An elderly woman was found dead or dying on the pavement near to the south-west gate of Queen's Park, Brighton. The curious and slightly horrific circumstance was that she had a stream of some algæ-like substance running from her mouth and filling the gutter. The suggestion at the time was that she had been drinking from the pond in the park and apparently this is what had killed her, but this explanation doesn't seem adequate to me. An account of this strange death by Mark Novell, a policeman who had attended the incident, was featured in FT's *It Happened To Me!* (vol.1, 2008, p.146) – but I remember reading about it in the *Argus* at the time; as I recall, it was a cover headline. Can any of your readers remember the actual date of the *Argus* article so that I can dig it up from the archives?

Oliver Tate
Brighton, West Sussex

Last days

On the border of France and Switzerland near Geneva is the town of Saint-Genis-Pouilly. The ancient Celts built a temple to the god Apollo at this location believing it was a portal to Hades, the Underworld. Today, Saint-Genis-Pouilly is the site of a modern-day Tower of Babel – the CERN Project. Physicists researching quantum physics are getting ready to open 'wormholes' connecting dimensions in the Universe and Christian evangelicals are warning them not to do it because Satan commands the Second Heaven and that will release demonic entities into our world. In the ninth chapter of the Book of Revelation God gives John a vision of the Abyss being opened with demons rising our of it 'like smoke from a great furnace'. Rising out of the Abyss with them is their leader, the king of the Underworld – Apollyon.

In the days of Noah the Nephilim played at 'genetic interference' – we know it as 'cloning' and it is an abomination to God. The Nephilim mixed human and animal DNA to create chimæras or 'monstrosities' that are depicted in ancient Assyrian, Babylonian and Sumerian architecture and sculpture. The Pope has just given his blessing to mix human and animal DNA for the sake of medical research. "And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it also be in the days of the Son of Man". (Luke 17:26)

If this isn't a sign Jesus Christ is on His way back I don't know what is!

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

YOU NOW HAVE FIVE OPTIONS
THIS LITTLE PIGGY....
Pauly.

PAUL TAYLOR

Cock Lane, etc

Concerning the Cock Lane Ghost ('A Haunting on Scandal Street' **FT335:36-41**), Roger Clarke appears to be making the same journey that a number of writers on the topic have made, in moving from a position of scepticism to entertaining the possibility that at least some of the reported rappings might have represented genuinely inexplicable manifestations. Prior to his *FT* article, in his excellent *A Natural History of Ghosts* (2012), Clarke seems to have dismissed all the Cock Lane events as chicanery but now acknowledges the precise history of the phenomenon is more complicated than generally presumed, indicating the rapping may have begun as early as 1760. This earlier origin tends to go against the theory of deliberate fraud throughout by Elizabeth Parsons and her father.

Certainly, there is a documented record in the *Annual Register* for 1760, which shows that rappings were known in that year, cited by Trevor Hall in a section of his largely forgotten book *New Light On Old Ghosts* (1965). Hall was known as an arch-sceptic on physical phenomena, but the discovery of the earlier date suggested to him that Parsons was not quite the villain presented in the popular retellings of the Cock Lane Ghost. Hall was even prepared to countenance the possibility that a genuine paranormal manifestation might have been involved. Hall's one-time collaborator Eric Dingwall took a similar view, stating: "Opinions on this question [i.e. whether there was a genuine paranormal phenomenon] differ now as they differed then, but the view that the whole affair was due to fraud on the part of little Elizabeth Parsons and her father has not been proved and is now not likely to be proved." (*SPR Journal*, v.43, 1965-1966)

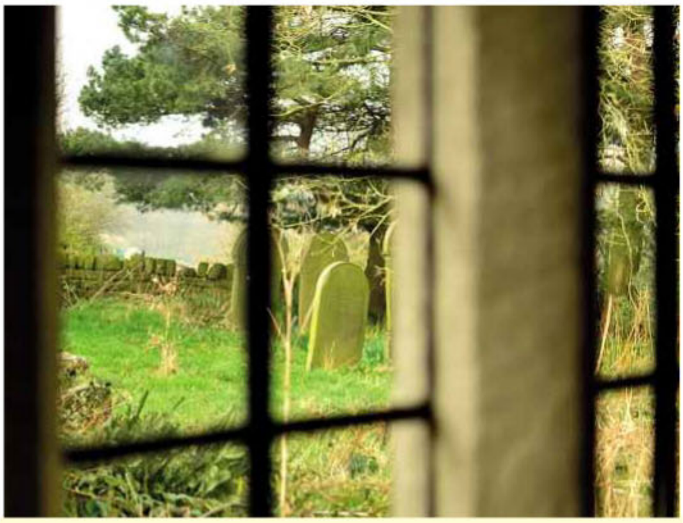
Multiple fraud in conditions of low illumination was the explanation proposed in the detailed study made by Paul Chambers for his book *The Cock Lane Ghost: Murder, Sex and Haunting in Dr Johnson's London* (2006). Chambers is very good in citing 18th century sources, but is far from comprehensive when dealing with 20th century material, although in mentioning the Enfield poltergeist outbreak as a comparator he states he is not qualified to pass judgment on poltergeists. However, he then proceeds to attack the genuineness of the Enfield case as a means of bolstering his own theory that the Cock Lane haunting was some kind of analogous case of multiple-fraud that went undetected at the time. As with other critics of the Enfield case since 1977, Chambers is remarkably vague as to how the supposed multiple fraud at Enfield was perpetrated, merely repeating the monotonous blanket allegations of trickery but not citing sources – in luminous contrast to his ample provision of 18th century reference material for statements in the rest of his book. Speculation and new ideas are always fine, but in the end it is the totality of evidence that has to be considered. Ultimately, Chambers only adduces his own speculation for long-running conspiracies of deceit at both Cock Lane and Enfield.

Examining the Cock Lane case, there are hallmarks of what came to be known as poltergeist disturbances from 1848 onwards; certainly the scenario of strange rappings and knockings around the bed of a young person was to be repeated many times around the world over the next 250 years, as well as in the UK. For two well-attested UK examples, see the cases at Sauchie, Scotland, in 1960, and Euston Square, London, in 2000, in both of which audio recordings of raps were obtained (detailed in *Can We Explain the Poltergeist?* (1964) by George Owen and the 'The Acoustic Properties of Unexplained Rapping Sounds' by Barrie Colvin in the *SPR Journal* (2010) v.73.2 no.899, pp.65-93).

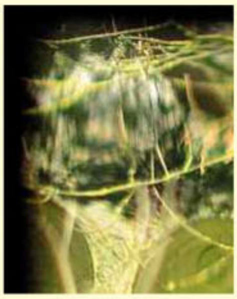
Roger Clark further informs me that little reliance may be placed in the final macabre twist in the Cock Lane story. This came in 1860 when what was believed to be the coffin of Fanny Lines was opened (mentioned in an appendix in Chambers's book). The preservation of the body was remarkable, raising the possibility of her being the victim of some kind of poisoning a century earlier, as alleged by 'the Ghost'. However, in almost a century between her death and the opening of the vault, many burials had occurred in the parish, so the identification of the coffin is questionable; and, in any event, one need not postulate the operation of discarnate intelligence if manifestations emanated from the unconscious mind of Elizabeth Parsons.

- Turning to burials of a different kind, the discovery of composite skeletons of different animal species at ancient sites ('Monster mash-ups' **FT337:16**) raises an intriguing possibility with discussion of 'Bogey Beast' apparitions. Jacqueline Simpson and the late Jennifer Westwood noted in *The Lore of the Land* (2006) how Black Shuck and Black Dog apparitions in general often seem composite creatures possessing characteristics of other species, such as cattle or even sheep. Could discoveries of these strange burials in the past have prompted the growth and belief in such entities in the area concerned or – a remote possibility – might they even be a distant folk-memory of some kind of ritual or interment at the site? It would be interesting to plot the folk tradition of 'bogey beasts' and Black Dog sightings to these burials to see if any pattern emerges.

• Finally, I am most grateful to Rob Kemp for pointing out the contradiction between the apparent identification by Denis Healey of the Admiralty Mews flat ghost as Lady Diana Cooper and the fact she was still living in spring 1969 [**FT338:71**]. Concerning the story, I had written to Lord Healey in my capacity as the literary executor of the ghost hunter Andrew Green (1927-2004) as part of an unrealised project to republish Green's book *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973), which mentions the claim. Regrettably, the reply I received from the by then elderly Lord Healey was handwritten, and deciphering his script proved challenging. 'Diana Cooper' was the best I could make of the name. Going back to the letter, I also find the sentence following the name next to impossible to decipher. Lord Healey might have been seeking to convey that it was a ghost of the living, or something else. I now hope to get a handwriting analyst to try and clear up this point.
Alan Murdie
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk



Pale church face



On 30 March my son and I visited Midhope church, near Stocksbridge, South Yorkshire. I definitely felt a presence there. When I looked at the photos I had taken I was very surprised to see a face on one of them, taken through the window overlooking the graveyard. The face appears between two gravestones.
Ian Blay, *Deepcar, Sheffield*

Fiery object, 1831

As a near neighbour of the former Fox Inn in Midford, I was delighted and intrigued to read about the fiery object that was seen from our village in 1831 ('The Running Man', **FT338:34-38**). The authors appear to accept a south-north trajectory for the object, but perhaps have been misled by local geography when they suggest that it took a westerly course after being seen from Midford. Almost certainly, the object passed not along the valley of the Midford Brook, which is not visible from the Fox, but that of the Wellow Brook, a conspicuous landscape feature which runs approximately from south to north, thus accounting for the sightings at Hinton Charterhouse and between Maiden Bradley and Frome.

Aubeck and Shough not only have the wrong valley, in my view: they also labour the point about the object coming 'up through the valley', in the sense of travelling towards higher ground: equally, the word 'up' is commonly used in the sense of "to the place where someone is" (OED). The description of the object ascending "out of sight" as it passed over the nearby canal would be consistent with it disappearing from view behind the hills between Midford and Bath: it would then have been on track for the subsequent sighting at Lansdown, on the northern slopes of the city (city folk, I imagine, would still have been in bed at 5.30am and thus saw nothing).

If I'm right, then the sighting at Brislington near Bristol is not the next stop after Midford, but an outlier, like those even further afield. This spread of sightings implies that the object was much higher in the sky than witnesses believed. This is a common feature of meteor sightings. Seargeant (2010) observes: "It is well known that meteorites always appear much closer than they are."

My own experience of collating modern sightings of similar objects reported as UFOs leads me to believe that this was indeed a meteor. Even in our supposedly less credulous times, people seek to explain the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar – so a 'running man' might now be a disc or orb crashing to earth in flames. Reports vary astonishingly in terms of timing, duration, direction of travel, colour, brightness and perceived distance from the viewer. Meteors don't scorch the ground as they pass overhead, but the Brislington account of 1831 has its modern, equally erroneous, counterparts. A fireball that streaked across the skies of north-east USA on 23 July 2001 led to a report of a cornfield being scorched – a claim hotly denied by NASA.

As Aubeck and Shough conclude, this is a tantalising event lacking in detail and now too far distant in time to draw definitive conclusions. One thing I can assure them of, however, is that although I can't help them trace Farmer Wooley, the family name – with variant spellings – is well-known in the area to this day.
Stephen Saunders
Midford, Bath

References

David AJ Seargeant (2010): *Weird Astronomy: Tales of Unusual, Bizarre and Other Hard to Explain Observations* (Springer Science & Business Media).
'Meteorites don't pop corn', http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2001/ast27jul_1/

Metaphysical musings

I have suggested that if you crossed over from 'our' universe to the next adjacent alternative one, you would not be able to tell the difference [**FT335:69**]. My argument was that the changes between each one would be so subtle (perhaps subatomic), that you would have to pass through thousands or millions of alternative universes in order to reach one where things were radically different. I now believe that it would be possible to 'skip' from 'our' universe to one where things have radically changed. (It is the equivalent of skipping tracks on a music CD. I'm not sure how you would do this, but I suspect that it would require a lot of power).

The only problem with this theory is that it assumes a linear progression of alternative universes, all lined up like a row of dominoes. Which brings me to my 'lattice' theory. Imagine that each alternative universe is a hexagon or octagon (for the sake of argument), all linked together in a lattice. Now with the linear multiverse you are limited to two directions, backwards and forwards. But with the lattice multiverse, you can go off in different directions and it is probably more likely that an alternative universe is radically different. However, this model assumes that alternative universes are fixed in one place. What if they kept disappearing and reappearing like a light being switched on and off?
Leslie W Hurn
Hales, Norfolk

it happened to me...

First-hand accounts from *Fortean Times* readers and posters at forum.forteantimes.com

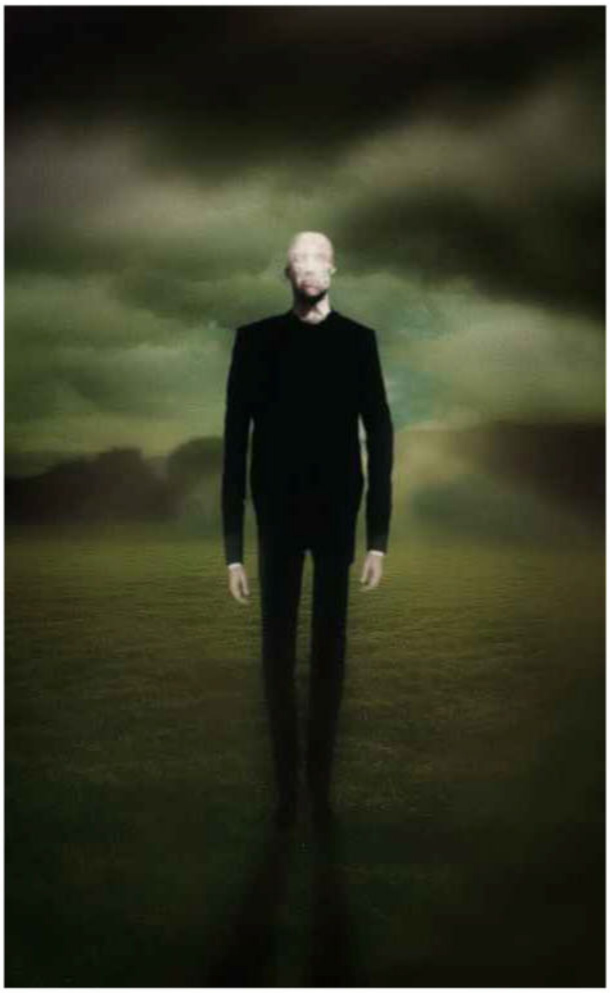
Disquieting encounter

Around 4pm one November afternoon, I was taking my dog Bryn for his walk. I live in a semi-rural location, so was surrounded by fields with long winding paths. About halfway down one of these paths, my little dog became agitated and pulled on his lead. It was almost dark by this time, very misty and quiet. As I carried on along the path, I became increasingly uncomfortable, as though I were not alone. I began to look around and listen for any other walker. Lots of people walk their dogs along this path, but I couldn't see or hear anyone. I began to feel uneasy and wanted to start back when suddenly, standing across from the path, was a very tall bald man dressed all in black with long arms dangling at his side and no facial features. Bryn became quiet and stopped pulling. I remember thinking that his arms looked far too long for a person. Apart from the head, he looked as if he were dressed in a wet suit. I just stood there watching him as he watched me. Then he started to spin and as he did so his arms rose up. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, but I knew I had to get away. I turned around and started to run, pulling Bryn behind me. He was barking loudly by now and didn't want to come with me.

I stopped briefly and turned around to check out what was happening behind me. The 'man' had vanished. He couldn't have run away as I would have seen him somewhere in the field, but he was nowhere in sight. I carried on running up the path and stopped at the field gate and looked behind again... no sign of anyone or anything. I carried on home, which was only one minute from the field. I closed my door behind me and stood in disbelief in the hallway. What on earth had I just witnessed out there?

Later that same evening I spoke to my daughter Natalie, who was living in Japan at the time. As we were chatting I mentioned my experience as it was preying heavily on my mind. She told me to check out Slender Man on the Internet, a character I had never heard of [see **FT316:4, 317:30-37**]. When I did, I was shocked as Slender Man looked just like the figure I had seen in the field. I know it is supposed to be a myth, but what I saw that afternoon was real and solid and right in front of me. It is now four years since this happened and I am still wary of that path and rarely if ever walk down it.

Monique Jones
Shenstone, Staffordshire



Walking to Cusop

Many years ago as a teenager I lived in the little parish of Cusop, a suburb of Hay-on-Wye on the English side of the Anglo-Welsh border. My home was a little under a mile from Hay, where I had been born in 1947 and where the majority of my friends lived. One evening, 10.30pm or later, I walked home along the Cusop Dingle road, a cul de sac that wound two miles or more up a pretty valley. In the 1960s it was lit by old-style lamps, few and far apart. I may have had a beer or two, but was nowhere near intoxicated. Just past 'Mayfield', once the home of Major Armstrong, a solicitor in Hay hanged in the early 1920s for the murder of his wife with arsenic, I noticed a woman near the only light on that stretch of the road. She was short in stature, with a headscarf and brownish coat, carrying a bag. I didn't feel comfortable catching her up and passing her, partly because I didn't want to frighten her. At this point she was 30 or 40 yards in front of me. Then she passed into the darkness beyond the streetlight before I passed into and out of the same pool of light.

The road had a raised footpath on the right, which I decided to walk on, and as I rounded the slight bend I could see the next streetlight some 50 or 60 yards ahead – but the woman had vanished. I should have seen her quite clearly if only in silhouette, and started to feel uneasy. Then I thought I could see someone or something with possibly a dog on my left-hand side coming towards me. I peered into the almost darkness on my left and was feeling quite spooked, the hairs on my neck raised. I thought it odd someone was walking in the dark where there was no footpath save the one I was on, on the opposite side of the road. It was sort of a shadow man, but at the same time semi-transparent. When it/he was opposite me I uttered a nervous "Good evening" – but it had vanished.

I quickened my pace, and there under the next lamp was the same woman, walking at the same pace in the middle of the road as I had seen her a minute or three before. Onward she went back into darkness once again. I didn't recognise her from behind; it was a time when strangers tended to stand out, as living in a rural place as long as I had one got to know everyone if only by sight, often from only a back view. Had I not been spooked, I might have followed her just out of curiosity to find out where she was going. I don't think she was aware of me; she never attempted to look behind or even turn her head 90 degrees. No vehicle passed in either direction. What had I seen on the opposite side of the road? Did I imagine it?

Roderick Williams
Talgarth, Powys

Afternoon visitor

Eight years ago I bought a tiny cottage (a bolt hole) in the country on the outskirts of a small village, and over the years there have been a few unexplained happenings. Before I came along, the cottage was occupied by a very elderly woman, who I presume died on the property. She was followed by a spinster who lived there for over 50 years.

One early afternoon in March 2014, after waiting four hours for an acquaintance to appear, I gave up and went to the village to shop. Arriving back to brilliant sunshine and a wonderfully warm sitting room, I settled down to read, but drowsiness overtook me. I settled under a tiny rug on my couch and went to sleep.

An hour later, I was awakened by someone speaking my name: "Barbara, Barbara!" I sat up with a start to see a man standing facing me only metres away. I quickly scrambled to my feet and called, "Sorry, sorry," thinking he had been knocking at my door. Then, "I'm coming, I'm coming" as the man disappeared into my kitchen. Seconds later when I entered the kitchen, the man had vanished. To my horror I then noticed the door was still locked and the key in a small dish nearby.

This was in broad daylight and was not a dream. The man was tall with medium long hair, with a beard and dark glasses. He was dressed in khaki and dull faded blue. Minutes later, I realised it could be either my male acquaintance or the man who cuts my lawn. Both look quite similar.

For some time I was a bit anxious as I was driving a high-powered new Porsche that day, and also cutting down large trees – a dangerous occupation. Thankfully, I haven't heard any bad news. I haven't discussed this with anyone, apart from two family members; I don't want to be known as a 'crackpot' in the district.

Barbara Stevens
Merivale, New Zealand

Uneasy nights

It was around 1970 or 1971, and I was 12 or 13 years old. Our family, in rural northwest Ohio, consisted of two parents and five boys (with me the third oldest), and had not long ago moved to a newly built house two lots down from our old one. Some construction details remained to be finished.

A few years earlier, every night I had been terrified of monsters when going to bed, pulling the covers up over my head and trying not to move so they couldn't see me or tell I was there. It wasn't helped by the fact that, in the old house, the door to the attic was right at the foot of my top bunk bed. But by the time of this account, such childish fears had fled.

On this particular (school) night, I went to bed in my room, the last of two upstairs on the right side of the hallway. Drifting off to sleep with the door closed (others were still awake downstairs), I was awakened by a loud, normal-sounding knocking on the bedroom door, but no one was there.

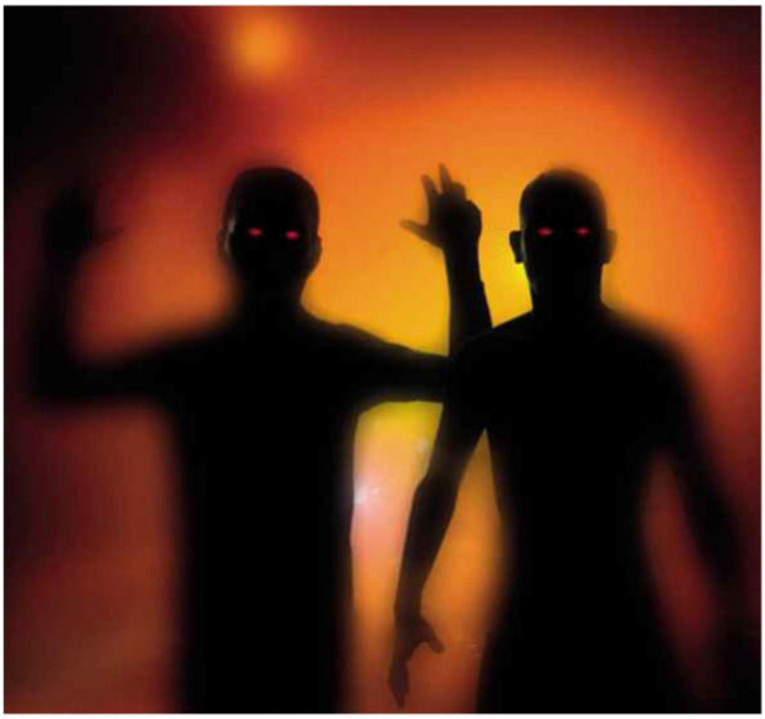
Thinking I was mistaken, I went back to bed. This time, I wasn't even drifting off when the knocking came again, a very normal 'let-me-in-I-want-to-see-you' knock, maybe five raps. Again, no one was there. Having older brothers fond of playing jokes on younger siblings, I also checked the next couple of rooms, the closet, and under the bed, thinking maybe one of them was hiding and having a little fun at my expense. But no one was in evidence anywhere I checked.

Well, by now, being suspicious of brothers' potential pranks, I walked downstairs and asked who wanted me. No one, brothers or parents, indicated they had come up to see me in my bedroom. Not satisfied with the answers, but getting no information, I shut my door and went back to bed, determined not to be caught 'sleeping' again.

I lay awake, waiting for the knock I was sure was coming (I didn't trust my older brothers as far as I could throw them). Sure enough, shortly the very normal-sounding knocking sounded clearly, and clearly it was coming from the door. But once more no one was there, and no one was nearby in a position to hide after knocking on the door.

Enough was enough. I left the door ajar, and lay awake, waiting to catch the dastardly brother so intent on spoiling my sleep. And very soon after that, the knocking sounded again. Except this time, awake, I could clearly see a black shape or shadow hitting itself against the door's hallway side. It wasn't recognisable as anything – not an animal, not an object – just a velvety black shape. The knocking stopped, and it was gone. It hadn't gone 'away' in any direction – it was just gone.

Every night, I had been terrified of monsters when going to bed...



I might not have been scared of monsters anymore, but I was a little 'tweaked' by what I saw. I checked around for a bird, an animal, a bat – anything that could have gotten in the house and banged against my door. I didn't find anything that night, or the next day, and neither did anyone else. It sure wasn't my brothers or my parents. I spent more than a few uneasy nights in the room until the immediacy of the experience faded. The incident never repeated itself.

T Miller
By email

More shadow people

I was intrigued to read the letter from P Dale ['The hide', **FT335:72**], who had a remarkably similar experience to myself nearly 60 years ago. I was all of six years old and playing with a friend of similar age at the back of our house in Leigh, Lancashire, on a quiet Sunday afternoon with no one else around. We lived above a shop and had a yard (with outside toilet) and a gate that opened up on to a back alley, which culminated in a dead end.

During the course of our play we suddenly noticed two figures approaching us from the end of the alley. They were human in shape but completely black, a deep matt black without any apparent clothing. They moved toward us in complete silence, but the most alarming thing about them was that they had no facial features apart from a pair of red eyes. Naturally, we were terrified out our wits. My friend ran straight through his gate into his house and I headed toward my house – however, my gate was shut and I couldn't reach the handle to open it. I cried and screamed loudly and banged on the gate as hard as I possibly could until eventually my mother appeared and asked what on earth the matter was. Turning around and pointing in the direction of these beings, I cried out 'Mum look! Look!" but there was nothing to be seen and I wasn't aware that they had passed me.

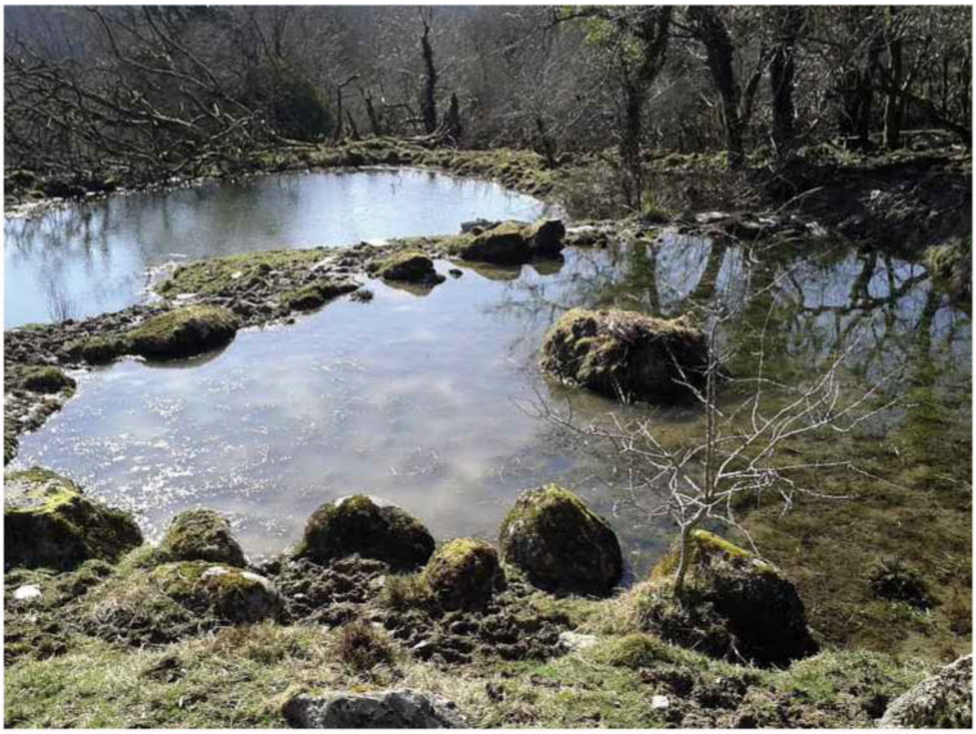
Later in life I mentioned this incident to teachers, friends and relatives, but no one ever believed me. Finally, after all these years (I am 66 now) I find that my experience was not an isolated one.

Roger Green
Leverington, Cambridgeshire

FORTEAN TRAVELLER

106. St Teilo's Well, Pembrokeshire

TED HARRISON searches for the wandering skull of a sixth century Welsh bishop with a reputation for taming dragons and healing whooping cough...


TED HARRISON

ABOVE: The spring waters that once filled St Teilo's Well continue to flow even today.

There are no signs to point the way and no information board to tell the history, but not far from the village of Maenclochog in Pembrokeshire there's a footpath that leads across a muddy field to some overgrown steps; and there below, in a grove of trees, is a place that was once one of the most renowned healing sites in Wales.

A spring of clear water emerging from a bank into a muddy bog is all that now remains of St Teilo's Well. The water drains into three pools used by the horses that graze the field.

At one time, however, the spring was a focus of pilgrimage. Hundreds came to drink the healing waters, and did so using the saint's skull as a cup. The skull was kept by a local family who were, according to one account, the descendants of an hereditary caste of pagan priests.

A spring of water emerging into a muddy bog is all that now remains

But how did this obscure part of Wales come to claim the skull of Llandaff's most famous bishop? Why was the saint's head used as the drinking vessel for his healing waters? And what became of the skull? The answers to these questions take us into the strange world of ancient Celtic head cults, connect with a truly weird mediæval legend and end up with a modern detective story leading to the rediscovery of a lost relic – in Australia.

St Teilo was a sixth century monk. Once upon a time, he was every bit as revered as his contemporary St David, although now he is rather overlooked in comparison with the patron saint of Wales. He is still remembered in many place names, such as the Carmarthenshire town of Llandeilo. In old pictures he was often shown dressed as a bishop riding on a white stag and he became patron saint of fruit trees. Hard facts are difficult to pin down, as they are about most of the early Welsh saints, but it is said he lived for a while in Brittany, journeyed to Jerusalem accompanied by Saints David and Padarn, where he was consecrated bishop, and that he returned to Wales to become Bishop of Llandaff. A number of improbable stories were told about him. In one he supposedly tamed a dragon and kept it tied to a rock.

He continued to attract strange legends when he died in 566. A fierce argument arose as his corpse lay awaiting burial. Church representatives from his birthplace said that the saint's relics should reside with them. The monastery at Llanbarn Fawr, which he had helped found, made a counter-claim, as did the monks of Llandaff.

After a day's heated disputation, the three factions went to their beds to sleep on the matter. The next morning, they found to their amazement that the corpse had miraculously replicated itself and there were now three identical bodies in the chapel. Honour was satisfied and the dispute settled.

St Teilo's tomb at Llandaff Cathedral can be seen to this day, just to the south of the high altar. Prior to the Reformation, thousands prayed at his shrine – indeed, throughout the Middle Ages the cathedral was largely financed by the offerings of the pilgrims. It was said that to swear an oath on the tomb was especially solemn and binding. In 1736, during one of the many restorations of the cathedral, the tomb was opened and the body of St Teilo, or at least one of the three, was discovered to be largely uncorrupted. It was wrapped in leather, and his bishop's staff, a ring, a pewter cross, and a chalice were found alongside him.

Like most cathedrals, Llandaff has a number of important tombs, including that of Sir David Mathew, who was awarded the title of 'Grand Standard Bearer of England' after he saved Edward IV's life at the Battle

HAM / CREATIVE COMMONS

of Towton in 1461. Generations of Sir David's family had also been the hereditary guardians of St Teilo's tomb. This was a necessary office, as well as an honour, as in 1403 the cathedral had been pillaged by pirates from Bristol. After the raid, it was Sir David who had paid for repairs to the shrine, and the family was rewarded by the bishop with the gift of the skull of St Teilo (though which of the three is unclear).

The skull remained in the family for seven generations, during which the importance of the tomb as a place of pilgrimage faded. The cathedral began to fall into disrepair and in Cromwellian times was even used as a tavern.

In 1658 William Mathews, the last in line, died and in his will he bequeathed the skull to his good friends the Melchior family, with the words "into thy keeping for seven generations, to be a blessing to future men, who when ailing, will have their health restored by drinking from it". He, or in some versions of the story a local wise woman, foretold that after seven generations the skull would be returned to another branch of the Mathews family and that "who restores the skull to the Mathews will see St Teilo riding on a white stag and he will bless his apple trees so that their next bearing will be vast".

The Melchiors were landowners at the hamlet of Llandeilo Llwydiarth near Maenclochog. When it became known that they were now the keepers of a celebrated relic, visitors arrived on a regular basis and in considerable numbers to ask if they might use the saint's skull as a cup to drink the waters from a nearby spring. Later, the family also bottled the water and offered it for sale.

The reputation of the spring and its macabre drinking vessel grew. One party of invalids travelled 60 miles by carriage from the Gower Peninsula.

LOBSTERTHERMIDOR / CREATIVE COMMONS

TOP LEFT: Llandaff Cathedral.

TOP RIGHT: The tomb of St Teilo.

ABOVE: The tomb of Sir David Mathew, whose family were guardians of St Teilo's tomb and skull for generations.

On returning home, having drunk the water, they reportedly felt no improvement, but on learning that they should have drunk the waters from the skull they made the journey again.

There are many healing and holy wells in Wales that have strange legends attached to them and are associated with local saints. But how did the tradition of drinking the waters from this particular well develop, and why do so from a skull? One theory that became popular in the 19th century suggested that it was a throwback to pagan times.

Supposedly, in the pre-Christian Celtic era, human heads were offered at sacred springs and well water was drunk from cups fashioned from human crania. The hope was apparently that something of the courage or character of the skull's original owner would be imbibed. In later Christian times, this idea took on a new spin: that the skull or head of a holy or blessed person could heal.

An old story retold by Philip Gardener tells of a group of monks transporting the bones of a Dark Age Welsh saint from one shrine to another. "Having grown weary, the monks rested at a house along the way. One of the other residents of the house was moaning pitifully in pain and so the good prior took some water and blessed it solemnly. Then most strangely the Prior took a little of the 'earthe he found in the skull of a saint and 'caused the party to drink it; which was no sooner passed downe into the sicke mans stomack, but he fell soundly asleep, and when he awaked, found himselfe of his daungerous and painefull infirmity perfectly recovered'". [1]

Whether it is true that skulls were used in this way in Christian or pre-Christian times is a matter of academic dispute. Dr Anne Ross in her 1967 study of pagan religion in Britain [2] described how the Christian Church, "rather than banning the worship of wells, converted the cult to its own ends, and made the well the centre of the cult of the local saint rather than the local deity. It is consequently of especial interest to find that the severed head of the Celts is brought into association with the veneration of wells in a variety of ways… This aspect of the Celtic cult of the head, allied as it is to the veneration of wells and springs, is one of the most convincing features of native cults, where an unbroken continuity can be adequately demonstrated".

The historian Professor Ronald Hutton takes a far more cautious line, and while acknowledging that the early Britons may well have collected and displayed the heads of enemies, maintains that no hard evidence

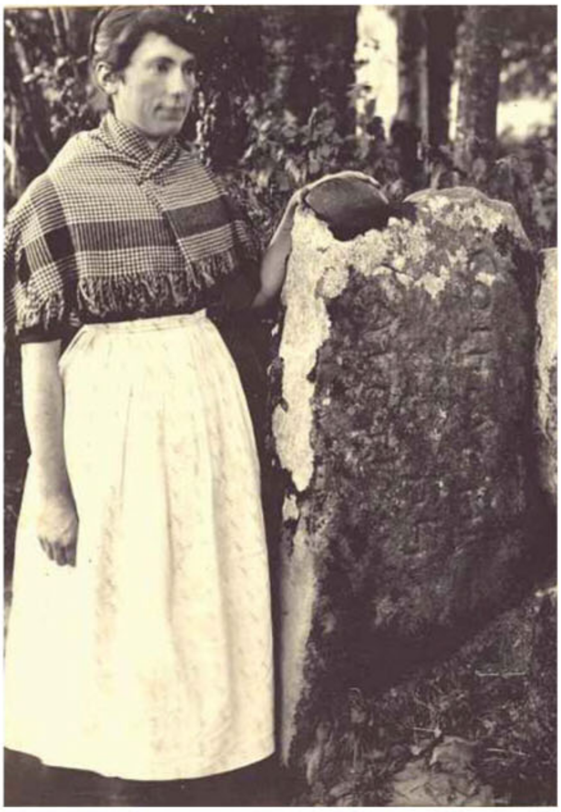
TED HARRISON

exists that the heads took on religious importance.

Gardener takes an etymological approach and writes that in Old German the word for skull is ‘Scala’, “which is also a seashell; the symbol used by pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St James in Spain – a symbol of life. In Old Norse it is Skel, which means, ‘to have scales’ or be ‘scale-like’. The word skoal, now a fairly common drinking cry, is also closely related and means to ‘toast from a skull’. This alone shows the deep-seated element of the skull in Western Europe of the use of a skull for drinking, as skoal was also used to refer to chalice!”

As in the case of many fortean tales, hard evidence should not be allowed to spoil a good story. Indeed folklore and oral history often contains truths, literal or metaphorical, never written down, impossible to verify, and open to elaboration. In the case of St Teilo’s skull it was suggested that the hereditary keepers of the skull were the descendants of an ancient caste of priests who were the guardians of sacred springs.

The 19th century Celtic philologist Sir John Rhys was receptive to the theory that there was a link between holy wells and the ancient head cult. He published a paper in 1893, in which he quoted St Teilo’s well as an example of a place where an originally pagan caste of ‘priestly’ well-keepers had survived into modern times. Within a few years, with this endorsement, the theory became quoted as fact, and the folklorist Sabine Baring Gould declared firmly that St Teilo’s well had “always had a recognised priest, or guardian, or owner, who lived near it, and no doubt represented the ancient pre-Christian priesthood”.



The hereditary keepers of the skull were from an ancient caste of priests

TOP: St Teilo’s Well today.

ABOVE: Miss Dinah Melchior with St Teilo’s skull, used, she explained, to drink from the well as a cure for whooping cough.

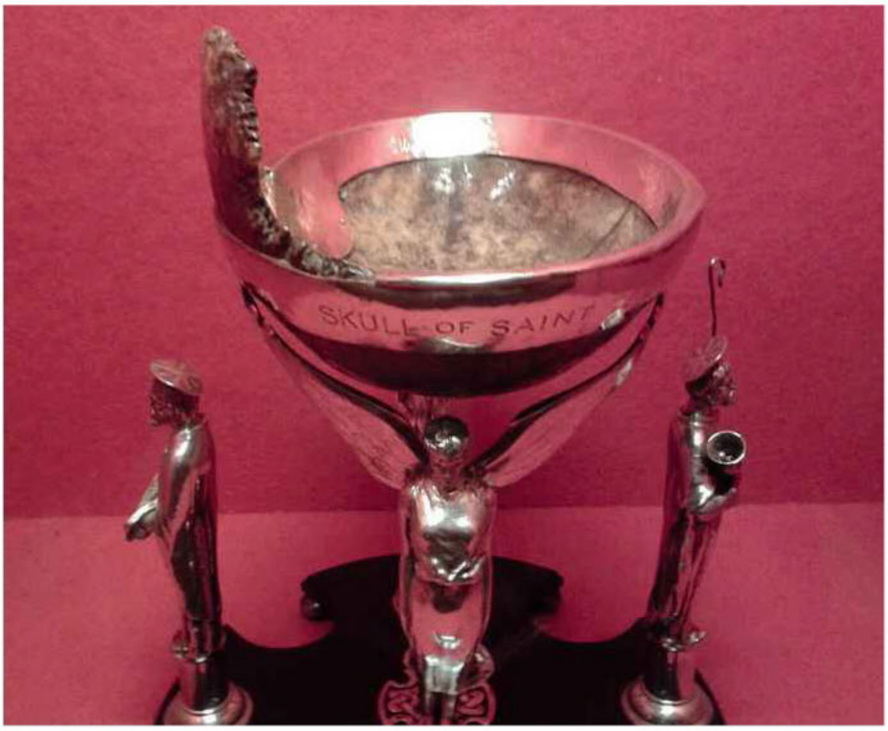
The Rev Dr Patrick Thomas, well known as a collector of local stories and one time rector of a parish that also had a St Teilo’s well, was happy to retell the story of St Teilo’s skull, suggesting that it might predate the saint.

“Those who first drank from ‘Penglog Teilo’ centuries before the saint was born presumably hoped to acquire some special quality associated with the person to whom it had belonged. This may have been linked from the very beginning with an additional belief in the healing virtues of the well. Later, when the cult had been absorbed into Christianity and linked with the saint who had founded the little church nearby, the skull was seen as the vehicle of Teilo’s miraculous healing powers”.

In Dr Thomas’s own parish, St Teilo’s well was not associated with a human skull, but its waters were said to have been used for baptisms by St Teilo when he brought Christianity to the area and for 1,400 years thereafter.

Yet even if pre-Christian Britons had attached sacred significance to drinking from human skulls, is it possible that the reputation attached to St Teilo’s skull is connected with this practice? The historical evidence dates the arrival of the skull at the well to the late 17th century, when the Melchior family took possession of the relic. Prior to that time the spring might have been used as a chalybeate well, but there is no record of a human skull being involved in collecting the water, or indeed that the spring had any sacred significance. The fact that from the 17th century a local family kept St Teilo’s skull and made it available to visitors is in itself no proof that they were of an ancient priestly caste. There were several instances in Wales and elsewhere of local families acting as well keepers. Far from performing a long-forgotten priestly duty they were most likely simply appreciative of the tips they received for their trouble from the wealthier visitors.

There are the ruins of a church a couple of hundred yards from St Teilo’s well, but it is not a well chapel built over the spring. According to the Dyfed Archæological Trust, the church is considerably earlier than the 17th century. Its origins are mediæval and the site may also have been an early post-Roman cemetery. An adjacent earthwork suggests that it could be a re-used Iron Age enclosure associated



ABOVE: St Teilo's skull, now back in Llandaff Cathedral in its reliquary near the saint's tomb.

TED HARRISON

with a nearby cromlech after which a local house called Temple Druid is named. There is no clear link between the church and the well.

In 1890 a descendant of a surviving branch of the Mathew family – now with an 's' added to the family name – asked for the skull of St Teilo to be returned. The Melchiors refused. However, in 1927, Miss Dinah Melchior, last of the line, agreed to sell the skull to Gregory Mathews for £50. Gregory represented a branch of the family, now living in Australia, descended from Sir David Mathew's brother Robert, of Castell y Mynych.

Miss Melchior wrote to the new owners to tell them how for centuries the skull "has been used to take water from St Teilo's Well at Llandeilo for the use of sufferers from whooping cough, it being an old belief that those who drink water from this well out of the skull of St Teilo are cured of this complaint." Miss Melchior repeated the family story that the skull had come from the body of St Teilo in Llandaff Cathedral and said that the skull had been examined by the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in London.

But was the skull really that of St Teilo, in any of the three versions? In 1927, the anthropologist Sir Arthur Keith examined it at Gregory Mathews's request and said that it was the skull of a Welshman of medium height and aged about 60; but in his opinion it dated from the 14th or 15th century, 800 years after the great era of the Welsh saints. Had the bishop who had rewarded Sir David Mathew with the gift of a sacred relic palmed him off with a fake? There appears to be no written account of whether the body at Llandaff was headless when the tomb was opened at the end of the 18th century.

Whatever its provenance, the cranium of the saint was duly set on a special reliquary stand by the Mathews family – but what happened next is a mystery. It disappeared from the public record despite a number of efforts to track it down and was the subject of much speculation in the press. In 1939, a newspaper appeal eventually resulted in the skull being traced to a member of the Mathews family living in Winchester. But then it disappeared again. In wartime Britain there were more important things to worry about than a saint's skull of dubious origins.

According to Kemmis Buckley in his essay of 1999,[3] a Miss Constance Allen mounted a determined search after World War II. She contacted Alister Mathews, Gregory's son, who told her that the skull "is not here but in the vaults of a bank, so I could not show it to you". The bank, wrote Buckley, was possibly in Bournemouth where he lived.

Despite efforts by the Llandaff archivist and the vicar of Maenclochog to search for clues as to the skull's whereabouts, the trail went cold. In 1991, Kemmis Buckley could find no record of the skull anywhere in the UK and began to think it might have gone to Australia. Diligent enquiries discovered that when Alister Mathews had died in 1985 the relic had indeed gone to cousins in New South Wales. Thousands of miles away from the well, there was little the family could do with their curious heirloom. So they returned it to Wales – to Llandaff. On St Teilo's Feast Day, 9 February 1994, Captain Robert Mathews, the Hereditary Keeper, presented the skull to the Cathedral during Evensong. It is now kept in a reliquary in a side chapel a few feet from the saint's tomb and can be seen through the glass by visitors. It is no longer available as a water cup.

History has come full circle with many questions left unanswered. How is the legend of St Teilo's remains being miraculously multiplied best explained? Does the skull truly date back to the sixth century? Was a mediæval Bishop of Llandaff guilty of deceiving Sir David Mathew? Was the well with which the skull came to be associated really the site of an ancient Celtic head cult? Did the waters have the power to cure whooping cough if drunk from the skull of St Teilo? And what happened after Captain Mathews returned the skull to the cathedral? Did his apple trees produce a remarkable crop of fruit? Did he ever see the saint riding on a white stag? **FT**

NOTES

1 Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, 1967. Dr Ross, of course, was a central figure in the mystery of the Hexham Heads; see **FT294:42-47; 295:44-49**.

2 Philip Gardener, 'The Mysterious Head of St Teilo', http://bit.ly/1RUhOqQ

3 Kemmis Buckley, 'Llandeilo Llwydiarth – The Well and the Skull', http://bit.ly/23aW4MA

TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent and artist. He is a regular contributor to FT and the author of a number of books on religious topics.

STRANGE AND SENSATIONAL STORIES FROM

THE ILLUSTRATED POLICE NEWS
LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD

JAN BONDESON presents more stories from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

46. THE STRANGE TALE OF PROFESSOR BEAURIGARD

In late 1894, a strange newspaper story swept the globe. It was said to emanate from Dalziel's correspondent in Buenos Aires, and concerned Professor Beaurigard, of the Ecole de Medicin in that city. Beaurigard was a distinguished medical scientist who specialised in pathology and bacteriology. As a leading proponent of the bacterial origin of disease, he was in advance of the great Koch of Germany.

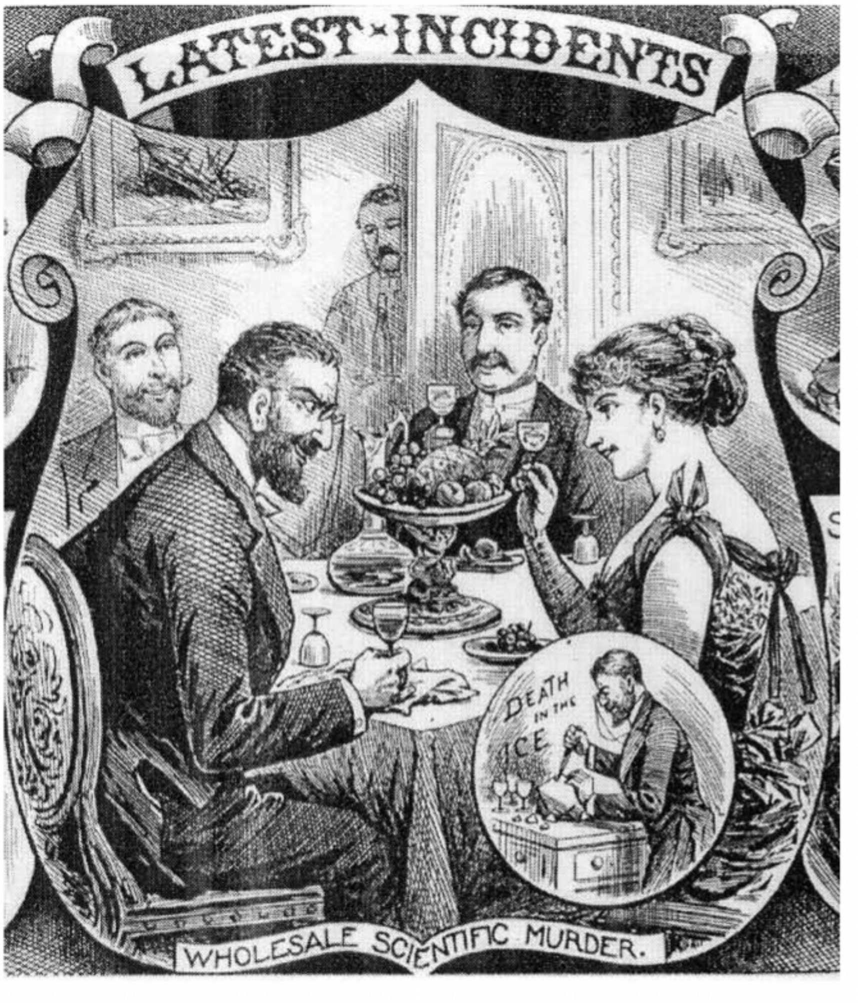
Professor Beaurigard was a polished linguist and a great entertainer who was famous for his dinner parties, to which never more than three guests were invited. The problem was that it was a frequent occurrence that these guests died within 24 hours of the party. The doctors attributed the deaths to cholera or yellow fever, and no trace of poison was ever found in the bodies of the victims. After 15 dinner guests had been dispatched in this manner, the police arrested Professor Beaurigard and had him stand trial for murder. The case against him was of the flimsiest character, and was in danger of breaking down altogether, when the prosecution called a last-minute witness. This individual was the professor's former butler, and he merely pointed his finger at the accused man. The plan was for the witness to make a full revelation of the facts the following day, but Beaurigard was found dead in his cell the following morning, killed by a drop of deadly poison hidden inside a diminutive gold capsule inside a hollow tooth.

The public prosecutor made a statement that the last-minute witness had been employed by Professor Beaurigard, and that his tasks in the household had included supervising the professor's dinner parties. The butler had noticed that after the coffee, the professor brought a block of ice from his laboratory and had it crushed into small pieces, for the guests to have iced crème de menthe. Himself, he always had a second cognac instead. One day, the butler had collected the leftover ice, and when it had melted he noticed it had an unpleasant smell. It turned out to be a living mass of cholera bacilli. The demented Professor Beaurigard had been experimenting on his dinner guests, intending to prove that the cholera bacilli would withstand freezing without losing their pathogenic power.

"Disgusting!" I hear the readers exclaim. But is this extraordinary tale of that modern Borgia, Professor Beaurigard, really true? It was reproduced in many American newspapers, and in nine British ones, although the *Western Mail* called it "A Sensational Story" and the *Dundee Courier* an "Extraordinary Story from America". As for the *Illustrated Police News*, it depicted the Mephistophelian Professor Beaurigard on the front page, supervising his experiment on the dinner guests with a sinister smirk. Several Australian and New Zealand newspapers also reproduced the story, the Perth *Western Mail* stating that it had been reported in full in the *New York Herald*. Suspiciously, neither the *New York Times* nor the London *Times* mentioned Professor Beaurigard, however, and it must be remembered that the newspaper press of the 1890s sometimes invented extraordinary stories said to have happened in some faraway part of the globe. These canards sometimes travelled the world, being regurgitated in newspapers in many countries.

So, was Professor Beaurigard an invention? Poisoning by cholera bacilli was a popular topic in contemporary popular fiction: the hero in Grant Allen's *The Devil's Die* poisons a man using cholera germs, and several of the novels of William Le Queux features villains making nefarious use of noxious bacteria. That cholera bacilli are capable of withstanding freezing was a novel and disagreeable fact back in the 1890s, one that might have inspired some unscrupulous American journalist to invent a newspaper story from faraway Argentina. Apart from some online newspaper repositories, the Internet has nothing whatsoever to say about Professor Beaurigard and his criminal activities; one would have thought that such a scientific pioneer and prolific mass poisoner would have been remembered by some Argentinian historian of crime or science.

The crucial test comes from the Web of Science and its online repository of cited references. A search for references to Robert Koch's old papers shows that not less than 783 writers have cited them. One would have thought that the works of Professor Beaurigard, stated to have been in advance of the great German bacteriologist, would also have been honoured by later writers, but not a single person has made reference to them. Thus the murderous Professor Beaurigard would appear to be an invention – and a successful newspaper hoax at the time, which was never seen through. It is amazing that the strange tale of the Professor's misdeeds was so widely and uncritically regurgitated in the worldwide press; clearly, a good story was considered to be better than a true one at the time.



LEFT: The sinister Professor Beaurigard supervises his lethal dinner party, from the *IPN*, 6 Oct 1894.

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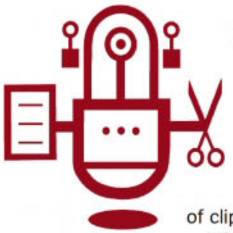

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 1 MAY 2016. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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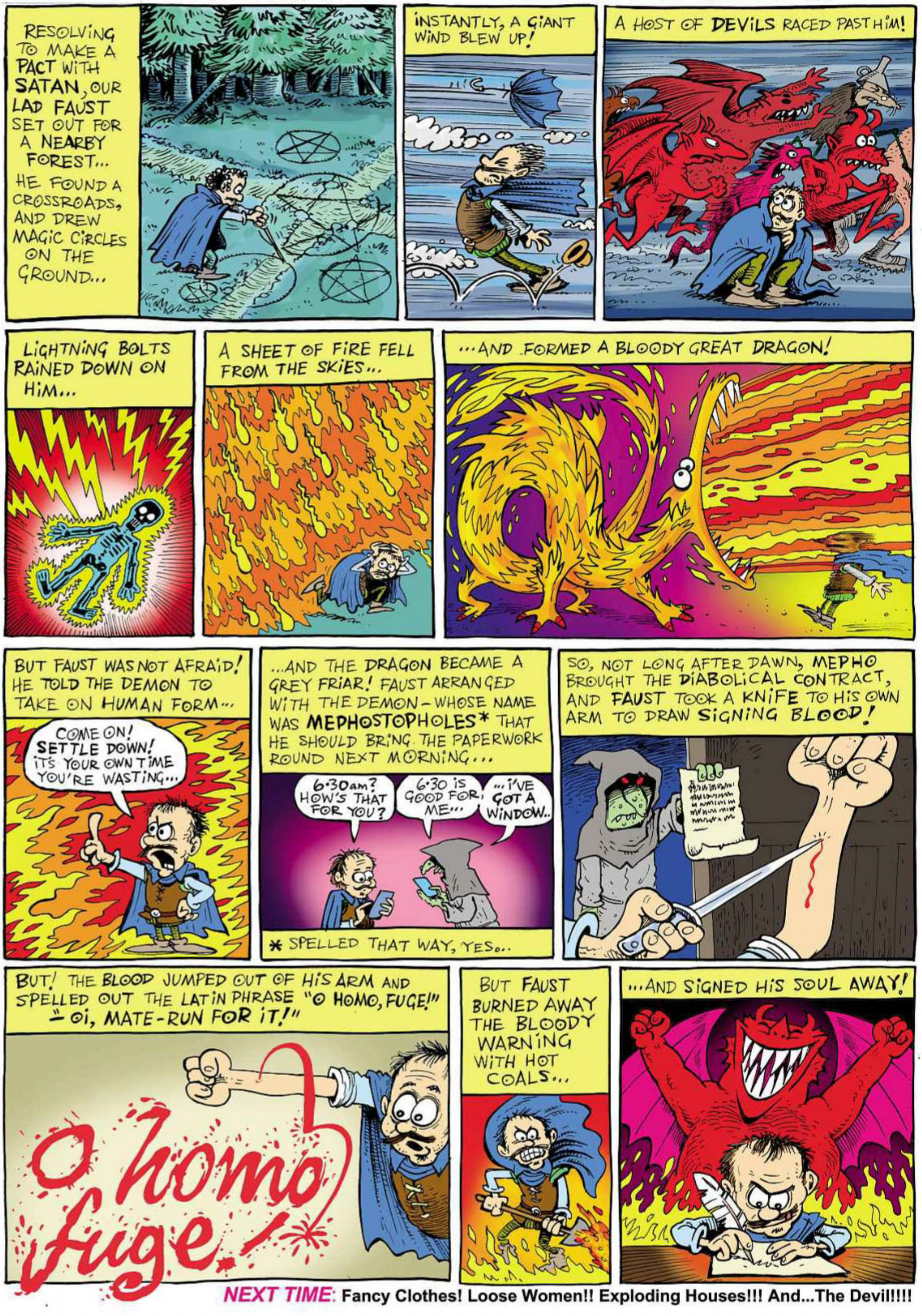
PHENOMENOMIX FAUST Part 2

HUNT EMERSON and KEVIN JACKSON


RESOLVING TO MAKE A PACT WITH SATAN, OUR LAD FAUST SET OUT FOR A NEARBY FOREST... HE FOUND A CROSSROADS, AND DREW MAGIC CIRCLES ON THE GROUND...
INSTANTLY, A GIANT WIND BLEW UP!
A HOST OF DEVILS RACED PAST HIM!
LIGHTNING BOLTS RAINED DOWN ON HIM...
A SHEET OF FIRE FELL FROM THE SKIES...
...AND FORMED A BLOODY GREAT DRAGON!
BUT FAUST WAS NOT AFRAID! HE TOLD THE DEMON TO TAKE ON HUMAN FORM...
COME ON! SETTLE DOWN! IT'S YOUR OWN TIME YOU'RE WASTING...
...AND THE DRAGON BECAME A GREY FRIAR! FAUST ARRANGED WITH THE DEMON - WHOSE NAME WAS MEPHOSTOPHOLES* THAT HE SHOULD BRING THE PAPERWORK ROUND NEXT MORNING...
6·30am? HOW'S THAT FOR YOU?
6·30 IS GOOD FOR ME...
...I'VE GOT A WINDOW..
* SPELLED THAT WAY, YES..
SO, NOT LONG AFTER DAWN, MEPHO BROUGHT THE DIABOLICAL CONTRACT, AND FAUST TOOK A KNIFE TO HIS OWN ARM TO DRAW SIGNING BLOOD!
BUT! THE BLOOD JUMPED OUT OF HIS ARM AND SPELLED OUT THE LATIN PHRASE "O HOMO, FUGE!" - "OI, MATE - RUN FOR IT!"
O homo fuge!
BUT FAUST BURNED AWAY THE BLOODY WARNING WITH HOT COALS...
...AND SIGNED HIS SOUL AWAY!

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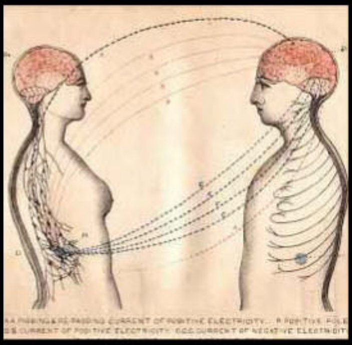

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FORTEAN TIMES 341

ON SALE 26 MAY 2016

STRANGE DEATHS

THERE'S A WHOLE LOT OF CHOPPING GOING ON...

A boy of 15 was beheaded by Daesh (ISIS) for listening to pop music. Ayham Hussein was caught with a portable CD player in his father's shop in Mosul, Iraq. He was convicted by a kangaroo court and taken to a public square where a 20-stone Daesh thug known as the 'Bulldozer' removed his head with a sword. Back in 2014, the death cult banned music in "cars, at parties, in shops and in public", describing it as "a corruption of the heart". Coloured pencils have been banned in Mosul schools. The Gang of Fort would not be surprised to learn that laughter is also a capital offence in the brave new caliphate. *Sun, 19 Feb 2016*.

Decapitation, of course, is not the sole prerogative of al-Baghdadi's merry pranksters. Moni (or Purni) Orang, 63, a mother of five, was seized from her home in the Sonitpur district of Assam in India on 20 July 2015 after a 35-year-old woman, who claimed to be a goddess, accused her of casting spells and causing illness. About 200 people led Orang to a stream, where she was stripped naked, dismembered and beheaded by a gang of about 200 villagers. Five men and two women were arrested, but the next day villagers stormed the local police station in protest. Kiran Teronpi told a local television station: "There is no place for such sorcerers and so her killing is justified." By the following day, there had been a further nine arrests (including seven women). Police in Assam said nearly 90 people, mostly women, have been beheaded, burnt alive or stabbed to death after such accusations over the last six years. Superstitious beliefs are behind some of these attacks, but there are occasions when people – especially widows – are targeted for their land and property. *[AFP] BBC News, 21+22 July 2015.*

A Cambodian man was decapitated by villagers after he was accused of sorcery. Khieu Porn, 55, was hacked to death with axes during a rice harvest festival in Kampong Speu province. He was a traditional healer who came under suspicion after a number of people died in his home area. *MX News (Sydney), 21 Jan 2014*.

Rintu Karmakar, 55, tried to decapitate his wife Muna, 45, with an axe as she slept because she had not made dinner. "I spent all day working and when I got home she was asleep in bed after having drunk too much," he said. "Nothing had been done of the household chores. There wasn't even any dinner for me." When his attempt failed, he beheaded her with a scythe. He then cooked his own meal and threw his wife's head in the back of his truck before going to a police station in Jamshedpur – in the Indian state of Jharkhand – and confessing. *Sun on Sunday, 21 Dec 2014.*

On 4 September 2014, three days after losing his job as a bill poster, Nicholas Salvador, 25, staying with friends in Nightingale Road, Edmonton, north London, beheaded two of his hosts' cats, thinking they were "demons". Carrying a broom handle and a machete, he then made his way through three back gardens and beheaded Palmira Silva, an 82-year-old Italian café owner and great grandmother, before brandishing her head towards a police helicopter. The wannabe cage fighter later told a psychiatrist: "I thought she was Hitler. She was really an evil being in the shape of an old woman. She was an alien from outer space." He was arrested in a nearby house following a violent struggle in which he was Tasered six times, kicked and punched, as he repeated phrases such as "red is the colour" and "I am the king", and tried to chew a skirting board. He then bit one of the police officers on the shin, causing a deep wound that required hospital treatment. In the weeks before the attack, he had started behaving oddly and developed an interest in "shapeshifters". He was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and detained in Broadmoor. *BBC News, 22 June 2015.*

Two brothers beheaded their teenage sister for having an affair with her cousin, and then carried her head through the village in the Shahjahanapur district of Uttar Pradesh in India. At least 12 people watched Pool Jehan, 17, dragged from her home, beaten and decapitated by her older siblings – who were on the run at the time of the report. *Sun, Metro, 20 Aug 2015.*

Lakhikanta Karmakar, an Indian tantric calling himself Shyama, was sentenced to death after he confessed to beheading a newborn baby in Bankura village in West Bengal and licking the blood from its severed head as it hung from a tree in the graveyard of a Kali temple, where he had built a shrine in 2012. The torso was never found, nor the parents located. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 7 Feb 2014*.

Tirumala Rao, 35, decapitated four-year-old Manu Sagar as a sacrifice to Kali, hoping the goddess would grant him power and wealth. A manhunt was launched after the boy's headless body was found by his parents in the remote settlement of Pokur in the Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh in southern India. Rao was tracked down, tied to a tree and set on fire. *(Adelaide) Sunday Mail, 4 Oct 2015.*

Richard Madirisha, 31, a local leader in Tanzania, was beheaded by a gang of men following accusations of adultery. "Five people stormed his room wielding machetes, beheaded him, chopped off legs, hands and genitals," said the local police chief, adding that the assailants later cooked the chopped off body parts. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 27 Jan 2015*.

THE FORTEAN TIMES BOOK OF STRANGE DEATHS VOL 2

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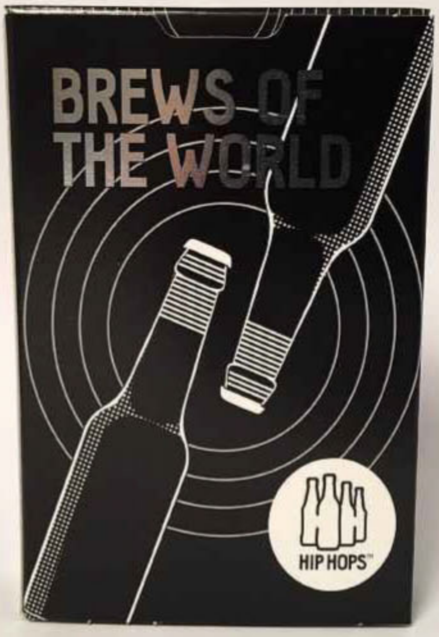
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